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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 1975, a committee on the use of English was appointed by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois to determine the nature of the writing problem in the college, to assess its significance, and to make recommendations for the improvement of student writing. As part of their work, the committee obtained questionnaire responses from the faculty of the college and from a random sample of senior students to provide factual information about writing practices in the college and to give both groups an opportunity to suggest solutions to perceived problems. Separate sections of this report discuss the origin and purpose of the committee; evidence of declining quality in student writing; student writing in the college; measurement and evaluation of writing; writing requirements and writing courses; staffing, organization, and supervision of writing courses; recommendations to the college; and technical results from the questionnaire surveys. (AA)

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COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES - UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

1976

REPORT ON THE STATUS OF STUDENT WRITING IN THE COLLEGE

to

Dean Robert W. Rogers

COMMITTEE ON THE USE OF ENGLISH

Roger K. Applebee, Chairman
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COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES -- UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

August 10, 1976

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE USE OF ENGLISH

I. ORIGIN AND PURPOSE OF THE COMMITTEE

Early in the academic year 1975-76, reports from two national testing agencies indicated that test scores had declined substantially during the previous decade, particularly those scores reflecting verbal ability; and the national press was quick to take up such a fundamental educational issue. Within the College, general complaints about the low quality of student English had been expressed over the past several years, and the Rhetoric Division of the Department of English reported that there had been a steady decline in writing skills as measured by the departmental proficiency and placement examination during the period 1968-1974.

Faced with this evidence in the fall of 1975, Dean R. W. Rogers appointed an ad hoc Committee on the Use of English to determine the nature of the writing problem in the College, to assess its significance, and to make recommendations for the improvement of student writing. Because of the complexity of the task, Dean Rogers and Vice Chancellor Weir appointed a sub-committee in December, 1975, to focus on the particular concerns of remedial or developmental writing.

Operation of the Committee

With the exception of the spring break and the semester interval, the Committee on the Use of English met frequently during the year, for a total of 27 meetings. In the early weeks persons from outside the committee were asked to comment from their individual viewpoints; later on the committee was informed of practices and opinions in the College from questionnaire responses.

The committee is grateful for the additional unsolicited comments sent to them, often by general observers, but also by writing specialists. Detailed information on writing in comparable universities was provided by the staff of the Committee on

Institutional Cooperation, which had in 1975 queried liberal arts deans of the thirteen CIC campuses about English composition. From these early documents, it was clear that the perceived decline in English composition was not a local affair and that many of our sister institutions were concerned also to the point of conducting special studies or of charging committees to assess "the writing problem." A meeting of those having primary responsibility for these studies was convened in Chicago in May 1976 where it was agreed that results of such investigations as this one would be circulated among CIC universities.

At its first meeting the committee determined to ascertain student and faculty views on several of the more apparent issues. To that end two questionnaires were developed in some haste--to be distributed to the faculty of the College and to a random sample of senior students--both to give factual information about writing practices in the College and also to provide both groups an opportunity to suggest solutions to any problems perceived. The data obtained--reflecting both fact and opinion--have been found most useful by the committee; and in spite of the modest return of approximately one-third of the questionnaires, the committee believes the responses to be a valid and cogent reflection of writing practices and policies in the College.

Early in its discussions the committee recommended that the advice from other campuses be sought to augment information received from the CIC group. Letters were therefore obtained from chairmen of writing programs on other Illinois campuses. Impressions and in some cases historical commentaries on student writing were solicited from publishers and editors specializing in college texts.

The committee further informed itself of studies of freshman composition that had been previously undertaken on the national level. Along with the two major studies of recent years (Albert Kitzhaber's Themes, Theories and Therapies, Carnegie Series (1963); and Thomas Wilcox's The Anatomy of College English, Jossey-Bass (1973),

members of the committee read articles reflecting some of the issues involved in the teaching of college composition, some of them drawn from The Bulletin of the Association of Departments of English or from NCTE publications such as College English and College Composition and Communication. Of special interest and help with regard to the reports by the testing agencies was an interpretive monograph by Annegret Harnischfeger and David E. Wiley for the ML-Group for Policy Studies in Education entitled Achievement Test Score Decline: Do We Need to Worry? Early reports from ad hoc committees at Ohio State and Indiana were found useful as well.

From the outset, the committee determined to explore the issues of student writing in the context of the College and the campus although reports from the testing agencies indicated that the alleged decline in writing ability was very broad in its scope. Dean Rogers notes in his letter of charge (September 30, 1975):

> The problem is obviously a complex one: there is little in contemporary society that encourages either literacy or skill in written communication in the college-age group. Public schools appear to have abandoned the effort; and, it must be confessed, there is little insistence on the part of the faculty to promote high standards of language usage among our students, even in the humanities and social sciences.

Many have in fact asserted that the crux of the difficulty resides in the schools, particularly in the secondary schools, where English programs have undergone considerable change in the most recent ten or fifteen years. Even had it been desirable to explore changes in the substance and method of high school English, however, the task would have been beyond the ability of the ad hoc committee to undertake during the time given it. Rather, the committee depended on insights provided by one of its members, Professor James Scanlon, who meets periodically with high school English teachers as a function of the University High School Articulation Program. The committee was further informed of the secondary school point of view in a meeting with the Executive Secretary of the National Council of Teachers

of English, Robert Hogan, and the Associate Executive Secretary, Edmund Farrell. In addition, the committee chairman had previous experience as a high school English teacher, and, during the mid-sixties, he had conducted research on high school English programs. Thus, while it cannot be said that the committee was completely and directly knowledgeable of all current trends and practices in high schools, neither can it be assumed that it operated in a complete vacuum with respect to high school English programs.

Most of the recommendations eventually made, however, reflect the committee's general preoccupation with the status of writing in the College. Certainly there is a great deal more ground that might be surveyed to put the many parts in better perspective; but the nature of the charge as well as the limits of time argued for a greater concern with issues and problems at hand rather than those removed from our proximity and our control.

It may be argued that a more comprehensive survey should have been undertaken, particularly one that concerned speaking as well as writing. Much of the discourse of the academy is in fact oral rather than written, and speaking ability is surely to be valued in a world which has come to depend as much (or more) on the voice as on the pen in its everyday affairs. Indeed, some would argue for a new primacy of the spoken word over the written word in our time. In brief, the committee would agree that the improved use of English in both spoken and written forms is very much to be desired; nevertheless, the constraints of time and ability led us to concentrate our efforts on an examination of student writing.

Each member of the committee brought a special perspective to the questions at hand, not only from his own academic training but also from his own personal experience and natural predilection. But this is not to say that the committee was biased, nor that its members were prejudiced regarding the issues, the facts, or the outcomes.

On the contrary, insofar as possible issues were discussed de novo. Although the committee "represented" the four disciplinary areas (humanities, social sciences, biological sciences, physical sciences) as well as the Rhetoric program, arguments were often made without respect to the area which one represented, but from his broader experience and comprehension. Opinions, interpretations, and facts were questioned and debated by the committee from October to May; happily the recommendations which form the real substance of this report were agreed to by all. In the end it was not necessary to count votes or to register opposing or "minority" views on the principal matters, as there seemed always a viable central position which was acceptable to all members of the committee. Thus, the recommendations represent the unanimous opinion of the entire group.

The committee was strongly assisted by two part-time staff members: Dr. Frances Warner, who reviewed much of the background literature and who provided helpful first-hand information from her own teaching experience; and Mr. Robert Bibb, who assisted in the development of the two questionnaires, tabulated and analyzed the data from a statistical point of view and prepared the statement of procedure in the Technical Report (p. 55).

The preliminary parts of this report are not so much products of committee actions as they are independently written accounts. Parts I-VI were written by the chairman. While most members of the committee would probably agree with most of each of these sections, the document was not subject to line by line approval or committee editing. It is possible, therefore, that one member or another might hold a somewhat different view regarding the particular matter being reported or interpreted. Part VIII (The Technical Report on the Surveys) was written in halves by Mr. Robert Bibb and Professor Robert Jones.

II. EVIDENCE OF DECLINE IN QUALITY OF STUDENT WRITING

Standardized Examinations

Table "A" below cites average scores received by all college-bound seniors on the Scholastic Aptitude Test over the eighteen-year period from 1957 through 1975. Scores from verbal and mathematics subtests are listed to provide some means of comparison and to show that test-score decline has been both general and specific--that whereas verbal ability has declined over the period (particularly in the last ten years), there has been a parallel though less precipitous drop in mathematical ability of high school seniors over the same period. From 1957 to 1963 there was a slight increase in both verbal and mathematical scores.

Table A

Mean Scholastic Aptitude Test Scores for College-Bound Seniors (SAT-CEEB)[1]

Year	Verbal	Mathematics	Year	Verbal	Mathematics
1957	473	496	1967	466	492
1958	472	496	1968	466	492
1959	475	498	1969	463	493
1960	477	498	1970	460	488
1961	474	495	1971	455	488
1962	473	498	1972	453	484
1963	478	502	1973	445	481
1964	475	498	1974	444	480
1965	473	496	1975	434	472
1966	471	496			

Serious efforts have been made by technical experts to determine the cause or causes of these declines on the basis of internal changes--whether or not, for example, the tests themselves have changed in form or in difficulty, or whether the composition of the groups taking the test had changed. From a psychometric point of view, the declines cannot be attributed to either of these reasons.[2]

The College Entrance Examination Board has charged a prestigious national committee

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[1] New York Times, September 7, 1975.

[2] A. Harnischfeger & D. Wiley, Achievement Test Score Decline: Do We Need To Worry? (Chicago, Dec. 1975), pp. 20-33.

to study the matter in an attempt to determine causes and recommend remedies to counter the apparent loss of verbal and mathematical ability of high school seniors. At this writing, the national committee continues to study the matter and it is not likely to report its findings for some time.

From the point of view of the College, a more pertinent set of data to review is provided by the American College Testing Program, the national testing agency which produces the entrance examination required of virtually all University of Illinois students. As can be seen by the chart below, a significant and parallel decline of test scores to those of the SAT has occurred in the American College Test (ACT). The four component mean scores are listed below as well as the composite scores from 1964 to 1973.

Table B

Mean ACT Test Scores for College-Bound Students[3]

Year	English	Mathematics	Social Science	Natural Science	Composite
1964	18.7	19.6	20.6	20.4	19.9
1965	19.1	19.5	20.5	20.5	20.0
1966	18.5	18.7	19.6	20.1	19.4
1967	18.1	18.3	19.4	19.8	19.0
1968	18.4	19.2	19.4	20.0	19.4
1969	18.1	19.5	19.3	20.5	19.5
1970	17.7	18.7	18.3	20.2	18.9
1971	17.6	18.6	18.4	20.3	18.8
1972	17.8	18.8	18.1	20.5	18.9
1973	17.6	18.1	17.9	20.6	18.7

In the ACT, math scores decline on much the same slope as do verbal scores; however, social science scores decline more sharply than either and, mysteriously, natural science scores drop not at all! One interpretation for the fall in scores in the social science subtest is that it is largely a test of reading ability or verbal reasoning, and that an incremental loss of these abilities compounds whatever losses there may be in social science content. Unlike the College Board experts,

[3]ACT Research Report No. 71, February, 1976.

American College Testing Program research specialists believe that some of the changes in test scores can be attributed to a changing composition of the testing group over the years. There are now more "low-scoring" students than there were ten years ago; changing educational aspirations and increasing educational opportunities (community colleges, for example) have meant that more students of lesser academic quality are now taking the tests than heretofore.

Reports on other standardized measures add to the evidence of a national trend toward receding verbal and mathematical skills among high school students. A statewide testing program in Minnesota (Minnesota Scholastic Aptitude Test) reveals that high school juniors showed the highest scores in the mid-60's, but scores have declined gradually over the ten-year period since. The State of Iowa has also tested its students annually using the Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED); and, once again, the mean score peaks in 1965 and declines regularly during subsequent years. It must be remembered that all tests mentioned above are generally of the same kind and format, i.e., multiple choice, machine-scored devices that tend to measure discrete aspects of verbal ability or skill rather than to evaluate the actual writing of students.

Another scheme, however, which does use student writing samples is employed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a program which has been in operation for the past twelve years. It differs substantially from the other measures in several important respects: It samples various abilities rather like a national poll, and it tends to be a good deal more comprehensive in the areas assessed. With regard to verbal abilities, the Assessment measures both reading and writing; the latter is measured not only by means of the usual kinds of questions and exercises found on standardized examinations, but also through an analysis of student writing. Several age groups are sampled rather than the whole range of students and adults; in particular these are students aged 9, 13, and 17. According

to the latest survey (1975) students in the 13 and 17 year old groups wrote less coherently, more simplistically and more awkwardly than their counterparts four years previously. On the other hand, the report notes that the mechanics of writing stressed in elementary and junior high school English classes, such as spelling and punctuation, "are being handled adequately by the vast majority of students."[4] The assessors found "no evidence of deterioration in their (i.e., mechanics) use." Paradoxically nine-year old students surveyed seemed to be moving toward more sophisticated writing than their counterparts of 1971. In total, there appeared to be a subtle movement away from the established writing conventions and towards some of the techniques used by newspapers, TV and the advertising field. An associate of the National Assessment suggests that the tests now being given to students "are probably out of touch with prevailing writing styles and conventions." He notes that "students are certainly writing differently but I am not sure whether they are writing more poorly. It may just be the result of some movement in our culture that we haven't been able to pinpoint yet."

In summary, recent data from a number of national testing bureaus and assessment agencies suggest that there has been a change in the writing forms used by high school students. There is as yet no reasonable and comprehensive accounting for this change, neither as to its causes nor its consequences. The most dramatic evidence of deterioration of verbal skills or writing ability is that provided by the College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test and the American Council on Testing.

Whatever the trends may be on a national scale, the committee was more concerned about the quality of student writing in the College. Complaints of deteriorating quality have been voiced by faculty from a number of departments, and the Rhetoric Division of the English Department has not been silent on the matter. Professor Dorothy Matthews, Director of Freshman Rhetoric from 1973 through 1975, reported a

[4] New York Times, November 19, 1975, p. 42.

steady drop in the average score on the rhetoric proficiency and placement test from 1968 (529) to 1974 (470). (Beginning this past year, the department stopped using the previous placement and proficiency vehicle, and now uses the English score on the ACT to determine placement and proficiency.)

Table C shows average scores on the four-part American College Test (ACT) for those students who entered the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences from 1966 through 1975. Although scores in all categories are considerably higher for University of Illinois students than for those nationally, a similar trend towards deterioration of verbal skills can be found here.

Table C

Mean ACT Test Scores for Freshmen Entering the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences--Urbana 1966-1975[5]

Year	English	Mathematics	Social Science	Natural Science	Composite
1966					25.92
1967					26.58
1968					27.33
1969	24.32	28.08	26.92	27.18	26.76
1970	24.23	27.64	26.01	26.85	26.30
1971	24.29	28.59	26.39	27.76	26.89
1972	23.80	26.06	27.56	27.97	26.48
1973	23.68	28.22	26.01	27.65	26.53
1974	23.69	27.82	26.12	27.80	26.49
1975	23.07	27.16	25.59	27.44	25.94

Whereas there is little change in average composite scores made by entering students over the ten-year period, there is a decline in subject areas (excepting natural science) with the sharpest declines appearing in the social science and verbal areas (from 1969 when sub-scores were first available). It appears then that though natural science abilities as measured by this test are fairly constant--if anything slightly improved--our students' verbal and mathematical abilities have been dropping fairly steadily. Since the present admission policy of the University is to use a selection index comprised of a student's high school rank and composite ACT, it is possible for higher scores in one area to "compensate" for low scores in other areas.

[5] U of I Office of Admissions and Records, 1975.

A question which the committee was not able to pursue in any detail is whether or not the student population is to any extent biased in the direction of numerical or science skills and away from those associated with more verbal areas (English and social sciences)--and, if so, the degree to which our present admissions system contributes to such an imbalance.

Further evidence of a bifurcation of our students (at least of their skills) may be found in comparing results of two standardized tests given to college juniors or seniors who aspire to enter medical school or law school. Compared to students in other universities, U of I students perform relatively better on that portion of the LSAT (Law School Admission Test) dealing with factual or professional matters than they do on the specific portion of the test which purports to gauge writing ability. In 1969 the mean writing score of U of I students on the LSAT placed them in the 60th percentile nationally; their score on the LSAT portion of the exam placed them in the 72th percentile nationally. The 1975 test reveals a rise of one percentile in each category.[6]

A similar phenomenon is apparent if one looks at the distribution of scores on the Medical College Admission Test taken by Illinois students. Mean scores of Illinois students in the verbal portion of this test show them to be at the 78th percentile approximately on the national scale but at the 97th percentile on the quantitative measure and at the 98th percentile on the science portion.

No comprehensive data were available to the committee to compare a wide range of students with respect to their verbal or writing abilities--such as the Graduate Record Examination. Nevertheless, the results from entrance tests and from the two standardized professional tests would suggest that, on an average, University of Illinois students are less well qualified in verbal areas than in those areas which might be categorized as quantitative or professional subjects.

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[6]Educational Testing Service Report to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

This difference of measured aptitude or ability may be a consequence of the differential aptitudes of entering students, a differential that is apparently wider at the U of I than at any other CIC institution. This question deserves close attention by those who are in a position to study the implications of admissions policies and procedures.

Results from the survey conducted by the committee in November, 1975, reflect faculty opinion as to whether or not writing ability of undergraduate students has deteriorated over the last five or six years. These views are shown in Table D below.

Table D

How would you compare the writing ability of present undergraduate students with that of former students (of five or six years ago)? (n = 282)

	Significantly Better	Somewhat Better	About the Same	Somewhat Worse	Significantly Worse
Humanities	1.0%	4.9%	39.8%	46.6%	7.8%
Biological Sciences	3.3	6.7	40.0	33.3	16.7
Physical Sciences	--	--	44.2	39.5	16.3
Social Sciences	--	6.8	59.1	22.7	11.4
Writing Departments	2.6	5.3	28.9	55.3	7.9
Others	0.5	4.4	47.8	35.2	12.1
Total	0.9	4.5	44.5	38.5	11.6

Approximately half of those who responded to the survey believe that writing skills have declined over the period, although the large majority of this group think that writing skills are somewhat worse rather than significantly worse. This is, nevertheless, a rough and ready indicator; and given the publicity generated on the subject during the period, the results are not surprising. Of more pertinence perhaps is the way in which faculty commented on this subject according to their own subject areas. Humanities faculty are less inclined than their colleagues in other areas to believe that the writing of current undergraduates is significantly worse." On the other hand, the largest single group among humanities faculty is generally agreed that writing ability of current undergraduates is

somewhat worse than it was five or six years ago. Social science faculty are the most highly skeptical group within the College regarding the question of changing standards of writing, at least this group is apparently least concerned about alleged deterioration of student writing than other disciplinary groups. Physical science faculty, on the other hand, are most emphatic that writing standards have declined.

Grades in Writing Courses

If one makes the assumption that final course grades reflect student ability and performance, one index of changing verbal abilities should be found in grades received by students in Freshman Rhetoric and Verbal Communication. The following tables note the proportion of A, B, and C grades given during the spring semester since 1968 to LAS students enrolled in Rhetoric 105 (or 102) and Verbal Communication 112:

Table E

Percent of A. B. and C. Grades Given for Rhetoric 105 and Verbal Communication 112
Spring Semester (1968-1976)

	Rhetoric 102 (1968-73) Rhetoric 105 (1974-76)					Verbal Communication 112				
	A	B	C	A+B	Total # Students	A	B	C	A+B	Total # Students
1968	17%	47%	29%	64%	1668	27%	45%	25%	72%	387
1970	29	46	19	75	1243	32	49	17	81	517
1972	32	43	17	75	463	55	38	6	93	154
1973	26	47	21	73	584	42	44	14	86	188
1974	28	44	23	72	1281	22	54	23	76	289
1975	31	46	20	77	975	24	55	18	79	205
1976	25	47	22	72	711	22	55	21	77	240

This record offers little support to the thesis that writing skills of students in the College have deteriorated badly. To be sure, grades in Verbal Communication 112 have fallen somewhat since the high water mark of 1972 (when 93% were given either A or B), but Rhetoric 105 grades have remained at virtually the same level since 1970, after having risen substantially in the late sixties. Nevertheless,

when more than three-fourths of the students in the College consistently achieve A or B grades in basic writing courses indicating above-average to superior performance, it is contradictory to believe also that there has been a pronounced decline in writing skills. And it must be noted that the most able students are not included in this sample: approximately 12% have been exempted from the requirement because of high test performance; 18% have been assigned to the special course for superior students (Rhetoric 108); and another small percentage have received credit from Advanced Placement English. At the other extreme, failure rate in the two courses has dropped from 2-3% to less than 1%.

In partial explanation for this apparent contradiction between grades and abilities, it should be mentioned that a rise in grades was experienced throughout the College (as well as in other colleges and universities) in the late sixties and early seventies.[7]

Other Indicators

Publishers and editors of college texts comprise a group of interested but semi-detached observers who might shed light on the question of whether or not there has been a significant loss in student writing ability. Although the committee agrees with the point repeatedly made by these professionals that the texts themselves merely reflect the prevailing attitudes and appetites to be found in the academy, the committee agreed also that ideas from this group would be useful because of their insights and their sense of history surrounding the subject. By and large, the editors were convinced that we were in the middle or (as some would hope) towards the end of a national trend in which the public, and to a large degree, the academics themselves, showed less interest in literacy,

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[7] See "Grading in LAS," by Paul S. Hoover and Paul Schroeder, On Learning and Teaching in LAS, 3., April, 1976. This report on campus grading notes a smaller percentage of A's and B's in rhetoric than in many other large courses.

standard English, or clear and concise prose than the previous generation. Reasons given for the trend were bewildering in their variety. One respondent (Peter John Givler, Director, College Department, Charles Scribner's Sons) noted that he had at one time or another heard the following argued as causes: "Watergate, transformational grammar, television, sexism and/or racism, paperbacks, Viet Nam, the weathermen, Mayor Daley, over crowded schools, property taxes, behaviorist psychology, humanist psychology, noise and/or atmospheric pollution, faculty unions, the lack of faculty unions, busing, and Webster's Third."[8]

In the welter of newspaper publicity following the first College Board reports, the favorite targets for those generally decrying the lack of standards or the decay of writing abilities were the schools (who were thought to have given up all efforts towards teaching writing) and television, which was accused of confounding us all. Television particularly is cited as the most pernicious cause of declining test scores and writing standards. Perhaps it is, but the committee had no way to assess this influence. Certainly the daily fare usually offered to the public is compounded of stock characters in search of banality; verbal ingenuity and complexity seem to have given way to the visually sensational. But the fault may not be so much with the medium as with the message. Surely there is no denying the possibility for the creative and positive influence of television if values and priorities were shifted only slightly away from those of the commercial interests whose scale of values is determined only by numbers of viewers. Another interesting account suggests that variations in the scholastic aptitude scores are directly related to trends in family size and the spacing of children.[9]

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[8] Letter to the chairman, December 2, 1975.

[9] R. B. Zajonc, "Family Configurations and Intelligence," Science, 192, No. 4236 (April 16, 1976), 227.

In any case, the committee did not spend much time studying or discussing possible causes of the test score declines for two reasons: First, we were simply more concerned in finding evidence for an actual change in writing ability at the college level; second, we were not able to weigh and sift the variety of evidence and opinion which supported one or another of the assumed causes. While each of the committee members will express his own view as to the general or specific causes, the attribution of causes is highly speculative; moreover, it invites subjective and anecdotal reports rather than significant and scientifically determined fact.

Nevertheless, one cannot live in the United States in 1976 without feeling some anguish for the general erosion of the quality of life and particularly for the lack of linguistic values. It may be, as some professionals have suggested, that the generation has begun to think less through complicated verbal constructs in favor of other symbols--less with words and more with images and "feelings." If this is true, however, the worst fears of George Orwell forty years ago are even now being realized.

The paucity of hard information regarding the comparative writing quality of students over the past decade forced the committee finally to rely on its own sense of things, its own collective intuition and judgment. And as a group, the committee was not persuaded by any single piece of evidence that there has been a decline of great significant; nevertheless, the sum total (and the variety) of indicators which purport to have some relationship to writing suggests that a trend has been in the making.

While it may be difficult to cite one piece of evidence for a decline in verbal skill and writing standards over the past ten years, it would be folly, in the face of the accumulated evidence, to prove that general writing skills have improved,

either on this campus or across the country. Eventually, the committee agreed that the evidence it found would have to speak for itself. Whatever it "proves," there is no question but that the writing performance and ability of all of us could be improved considerably, and it should be a prime goal of the College to promote excellence in writing as in other areas.

III. WRITING IN THE COLLEGE

If there has been an incremental loss of verbal skill and writing ability (as most of the evidence suggests), and if this decline is a consequence of societal pressures (or even genetic patterns), what is to be done? It must be agreed that there is very little that can be done by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to change attitudes at large or to reverse linguistic habits in Illinois or the country. In fact, there is probably very little that can be done directly to affect elementary or secondary school English programs. Indirectly, the College or the University could have some influence by declaring the value it attaches to student writing or by establishing a standard of achievement for admission purposes. The committee believes that both of these efforts should be undertaken, but it is less sanguine about their effectiveness than it is about those things which can be done within the College.

The Purposes of Student Writing

The committee believes that the cultivation of a student's ability to write well must be of high priority. There are two related reasons for the high level of importance given to this facet of a student's education--one specific and one general. Pragmatically, writing is a tool, a means for learning in all academic areas--from the humanistic to the scientific--from the simple to the arcane. Serious discussion of ideas, the marshalling of facts and arguments, the very process of conceptualization require precise control of language, and students without the ability to use English appropriately are seriously disadvantaged not only in their courses but in their careers. In all areas and at all stages, a student's performance is reflected in some degree by his ability to relate ideas and to inform his reader as to how well (or how poorly) he understands the subject at hand. It can also be said that the process of writing--whether paper, examination, or dissertation--becomes the means whereby the student engages, synthesizes, and, in fact,

learns, essential aspects of a subject. These forms of student writing have become such an established part of the academic firmament that many overlook their primary purpose as a means of learning, and consider them merely as ends or "products."

Beyond the instrumental value of writing lies a somewhat more personal and more general benefit. Writing on subjects that are significant and useful to the student not only broadens and deepens his understanding of those subjects, the process also improves his general ability to write and to think. Writing cogent, worthwhile papers or examinations in one area increases the student's awareness and linguistic repertoire, thus enhancing his value as a thinking person. Richard Lloyd-Jones, incoming Chairman of the Department of English at the University of Iowa, comments on the general or intrinsic value of writing as follows:

> The ability to use language defines humans, and the ability to use written language defines human ideas and emotions most precisely and enduringly. Often, as we write, we discover what we think and feel.
>
> Our ability to control language in a variety of ways determines much of our adaptability in coping with our personal crises and with those of our jobs. To some extent we imagine the hopes and fears and abilities and motives of other people because we have the language with which to shape our empathy. In an important sense all of our schooling is designed to make us better users of the language, so the quality of writing produced in and out of school must always be a central social problem
>
> Other problems may demand our short term attention, but in the long run our ability to write is a central issue of higher education.[10]

The committee is in agreement with Professor Lloyd-Jones on the vital importance of writing, both in the educational content and in one's personal development.

Given this dual purpose, it must be seen that the improvement of student writing becomes the concern not only of the specialist (the teacher of rhetoric or composition) but also of faculty in all disciplines and departments. To the extent that the purposes cited beomce part of the conscious aim of instructors who make writing assignments in all fields (whether anthropology, English, or Zoology, the

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[10]Richard Lloyd-Jones, "Is Writing Worse Nowadays?" Iowa Spectator, April 1976, p. .

educational process is reenforced; to the degree that writing is passively ignored or actively subverted by exclusive reliance on multiple-choice examinations, the learning process is fragmented or abused.

There are, of course, limitations that can be expected of a public university like the U of I. We recognize that the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences does not attract students of the same kind and purpose as, for example, St. John's College, which provides a rich, not to say literary, diet of reading and writing for its undergraduates throughout their four years. Nor does the College have the resources to conduct the kinds of tutorial and small group classes which can give great vitality to student writing. Because of the size and structure of the College, classes are often conducted through large lectures usually precluding direct discourse between student and professor--either in writing or in speaking. All the more reason for insuring that other opportunities are provided for student writing: in the sciences, during laboratory sessions; in the humanities or social sciences, through small-group discussion sections. Evidence available to the committee, however, suggests that opportunities for students to write are less frequent than one would like; and even when opportunities are there, faculty comment on the quality (or correctness) of the writing is even more rare.

In brief, the most generally held view of the faculty--as reflected on returned questionnaires--is that the improvement of student writing is someone else's responsibility--the rhetoric instructor's, the high school English teacher's, or the student's. If there is to be general improvement of student writing in the College, however, a more positive and a more concerted effort must be made by faculty and students.

Contrary Views on Writing

The diversity and size of the College require that there be some common understanding concerning the learning and teaching of writing which might be used as a basis for improvement. Towards this end, the following assumptions (some of them

slightly modified statements made on returned questionnaires) are stated and argued as a preliminary toward achieving a consensus view.

1. Writing is analogous to mathematics. The rudimentary tools are learned in the early school years and, like computation, can be expected to remain with one throughout life.

Response--Although there are similarities between the systems of writing and mathematics, the differences are at least as profound as the similarities. Unlike mathematics, which is nearly always learned in a closed situation, a good deal of one's native language is learned outside the school setting. Children talk more or less grammatically by the time they enter kindergarten; they add to their store of linguistic knowledge as much by what they hear as by what they are asked to read. Mathematics is controlled by precise rules; language (English or other) has its own rules as well, although these are modified by time and occasion. Linguistic rules learned in the elementary or even high school years give way to more elaborate, more flexible, and sometimes contrary "rules" of the college years; and new varieties of language (diction, structure and rhetoric) must be used by the college student to meet the differing modes of discourse in the various subject areas. By extending the above assumption, many believe that the schools should spend much more time and effort than they presently do in teaching the rules (i.e., the grammar) of English so as to produce more able writers. In fact, research on writing over the years shows virtually no positive correlation between the teaching of grammar and the improvement of writing.[11]

2. Clear and correct writing is a proper concern of the elementary and secondary schools, but instruction in writing is not an aprropriate responsibility of the College. Students matriculating in the University cannot be expected to improve their writing capabilities very much.

Response--Rhetoric and composition have been taught in universities for well over 200 years; English (both literature and composition) became a

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[11] R. Braddock, R. Lloyd-Jones and L. Schoer, Research in Written Composition (NCTE, 1963). See also. W. B. Elley, I. H. Barham, H. Lamb, and M. Wyllie, "The Role of Grammar in a Secondary School English Curriculum," Research in the Teaching of English, 10, 1 (NCTE, Spring 1975)

subject of instruction in the secondary schools and the universities in America in the early 19th century; for a hundred years required composition and literature courses have been common in colleges and universities. opulist movements were largely responsible for the inauguration of English studies, both in the United States and in England.[12] Although many universities in the last decade dropped the requirement in English composition, a number of them (e.g., Yale and Wisconsin) are now recommending a return to required courses. If students are expected to extend their linguistic capacity during their four years in the College, it follows that they are entitled to receive appropriate instruction or assistance during this period. In truth, none of us writes as well as we could or as well as we would like. While certain rudimentary linguistic habits are easier learned while young, there is every reason to believe on the basis of all evidence that the process of writing may be improved throughout one's lifetime.

3. Writing ability and writing style are so personal (even idiosyncratic) that they are not to be tampered with. To insist upon standard usage is to subvert one's sense of personal or social identity .

Response--Standard written English comprises a wide range of patterns from the highly formal to the very informal, and this range is in constant flux. Speech patterns probably are more conducive to more rapid change, but writing orthodoxies are altered as well. In this respect, language is a bit like Heraclitus's river--paradoxically changing, yet the same. To be sure, virtually all writing is flavored and seasoned by one's own personality and experience; nevertheless, commonly accepted understandings and observed rules are generally an aid to communication more often than they are a handicap. When conventions of speaking and writing begin to interfere with understanding, however, they tend to fade away. Unlike spoken language, much writing in intended to be more than transient, perhaps to affect persons quite remote geographically or chronologically. There are thus more conventions in writing (spelling, punctuation, etc.) which ease communication and, for better or worse, become markers of social worth to many. These patterns are enormously variable, however, not only with respect to time, but also according to the substance of the writing and the audience for whom it is intended.

[12] Alan M. Hollingsworth, "Beyond Literacy," ADE Bulletin (March 1973) pp. 3-6.

4. Only trained, professional teachers have the ability and authority to criticize writing.

Response--Most teachers of writing are themselves self-taught. The large majority of them (either in school or in the university) have actually taken few if any writing courses, although they will have spent a good deal of time in reading and writing themselves and having their writing reviewed and criticized. Ironically, many of the present instructors in the rhetoric program have never had a writing course. Because of an interest in or penchant for language, a number of them were not required to take freshman composition when they were undergraduates. Not all faculty are equally able writers. Yet it does seem paradoxical that those who espouse and value scholarly distinction by virtue of "publication" do not themselves feel capable of helping their students to express themselves effectively in their own fields.

Questionnaire Findings

Although the questionnaire survey conducted by the committee revealed little about the quality of student writing in the College, it did reflect a good deal about the quantity and the kinds of writing expected of students in their undergraduate courses. Nearly all respondents noted that some writing is assigned during every semester, although assignments vary enormously:

> A Geology professor asks for a "report of laboratory analysis of rock samples"; a Biology instructor requires a brief summary noting the current status of research in the field in which "telegraphic style is encouraged" to provide quick information to a large number of students; a Chemistry professor notes that students are required to write definitions which are then "pointedly graded on what they say--not what might be inferred from what they say."
>
> A Math professor notes that he requires "written solutions to math problems" and that "the problems are intricate and English is needed as well as the usual symbols." Another Math instructor pointedly notes that "only a minimum of verbal expression" is necessary in Mathematics.
>
> A Psychology professor notes that he requires no papers in any of his three 300-level courses. A professor in Business Administration requires four papers in a 200-level course and three in the 300-level course. An Anthropology professor assigns several papers in 300-level courses and none in the early courses--the former are "actually answers to take-home examinations.
>
> An English professor requires six 3-5 page papers on one of ten specific topics. Another English professor requires only one paper in each of his 300-level courses. A Spanish professor assigns papers both in English "and occasionally in Spanish." A History professor requires two minor papers

and one major paper for each of his courses and notes on an assignment sheet the requirements of each and the fact that the paper will constitute one-third of the course grade. A French professor requires two papers in each of his classes in which "close stylistic analysis of literary passages" are made, "often in English in order to get the best results." Another French professor notes that in his courses (at the 200- and 300-level) papers are written entirely in French.

Except to reveal the diversity of reaction and assignment in the variety of courses in the College, however, these random comments may not be as useful or telling as the summaries of statistical data showing the amount of writing assigned. Both seniors and faculty were asked to indicate the number of papers required in typical courses at various levels, the length of these papers and the proportion of examinations requiring written responses. Responses indicate a sizeable difference in the amount of writing expected in the "writing depattments" (i.e., English--including Rhetoric--and Speech Communication) and all others. This becomes apparent in the following summary of data from the student questionnaire:

Table F

Median number of papers required in typical courses by:

n = 123	Writing Departments	All Other Departments
100 level	4.0	.52
200 level	3.2	.64
300 level	2.4	1.0

Faculty responses report somewhat different results as might be expected. (Generally, students reported that they wrote fewer but longer papers than fculty indicated.)

Most students in the College can be expected to write a paper in only half of their 100-level courses, and only slightly more than that in courses at the 200-level. Assuming that those faculty and students who were most interested in the question of writing quality were the ones who responded, we must believe that these figures are, if anything, somewhat inflated and that students are in fact required to write even less often that reported. While lack of written assignments in certain courses

may be understood (for example in mathematics or computer science), the dearth of writing in other areas--particularly the social sciences--is more difficult to understand.

On the committee's questionnaire survey, seniors and faculty were asked to cite what might be done to improve student writing in the College, and both groups mentioned most frequently the need to require more writing in the form of papers and essay responses on examinations.

This view was corroborated by findings from the LAS Senior Questionnaire in May, 1976. [This questionnaire is given annually to graduating seniors. Response rates in 1976 were approximately 80%. The LAS questionnaire should not be confused with the committee's own questionnaire which was distributed to a random sample (25%) of seniors.] In the LAS questionnaire, all seniors were asked simply: Should the amount of written work required of you by instructors in your major are have been greater, about the same, or less."

Table G

n=999	Responses	Greater	About the Same	Less
Humanities	(188)	37	141	10
Biological Science	(280)	115	160	5
Physical Science	(151)	47	99	5
Social Science	(380)	141	216	23
Total		340	616	43

More than one-third of all LAS seniors believe that they should have been asked to write more by their instructors in their respective fields of concentration. Biological science departments and social science departments were singled out most frequently by students as those which they believed should assign more written work. While one-third is only a minority view, it is nevertheless a persuasive minority when one considers the question in its context. As it stands, the expressed view must be interpreted as an indication of failure on the part of many undergraduate programs to give appropriate emphasis to student writing.

While it is clear that many individual instructors are conscientious in their assignments and in their expectations regarding student writing, it must be concluded that for a variety of reasons many are also taking the easier option of asking for very few (if any) written responses from their students. Some of the reasons cited by instructors for not making written assignments follow:

> The size of their classes precludes the assignment and appropriate grading of papers from their students.
>
> Student writing is generally of poor quality and is therefore not an effective means for promoting or measuring student learning.
>
> The increased frequenty of plagiarism and the advertised availability of term papers in virtually every subject reduces the effectiveness of this means of learning. (A few instructors pointed to the exceptional difficulty of ferreting out those papers which are plagiarized and of reporting these "academic irregularities" in an increasingly legalistic atmosphere.)

The committee has made no effort to analyze the force of thsse arguments or the weight of the several apparent problems, and it does recognize that these responses are highly subjective. Nevertheless, the committee agrees that there should be some effort made to determine the size and nature of these problems. The best context for analyzing them may well be the departments, or divisions rather than the College or University. The committee therefore believes that departments should make an effort to determine the extent to which these (or other) factors deter the faculty from making appropriate writing assignments.

On the basis of results from the several questionnaires, it is clear to the committee that the quantity of student writing in the College at large is a good deal less than desirable. While we believe that some special efforts can be undertaken by departments in cooperation with the writing units to develop especially conceived courses at the 200-level (See Page 36), such preventive medicine cannot substitute for a regimen involving regular exercise and proper nourishment. Active learning in the College can be enhanced greatly by engaging students in important and creative acts of learning. We believe that these occasions can be generated and sustained in virtually all disciplines if there is sufficient will on the part of the faculty to do so.

IV. MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION OF WRITING

The Tests

The committee is convinced that the comprehensive assessment of writing achievement or writing ability is a highly important but very difficult task, a task that has not been accomplished very well to date. Given the complexity, range, and sophistication of language available to students and the varieties of writing which are expected of them--even within the expository mode--a single test which undertakes to measure writing performance with validity and reliability is complicated to develop. Perhaps because of the enormity of the task, most tests of writing are actually tests of related but sometimes inconsequential matters. For the most part standardized writing tests require no writing from their subjects. Rather, the devices dwell on reading or the mechanics of writing, although some attempt to measure verbal ability by posing questions involving word analogies or antonyms. Yet, the essence of good writing lies in those things which are not measured at all in this kind of standardized examination: coherence, invention, style, fluency, and rhetorical vigor. Instead, standardized "writing" tests attempt to measure the student's response to very limited kinds of verbal problems, and these tend to be problems of usage or questions regarding writing (actually printing) conventions.

There is strong sentiment among all teachers of writing to give much more weight to the student's actual performance than to his responses to standardized test items, and there have been a number of attempts to assess writing ability through the use of student compositions. The most serious difficulty of this approach, however, is the lack of consistency on the part of those who assess the writing; a second difficulty is that the process is necessarily long and expensive. Some efforts have been made, nonetheless, to incorporate both forms (i.e., essay

tests with short answer item tests), and the results of these programs suggest to the committee that there is much room for exploration, research, and development here. Along with the National Assessment mentioned above, the following programs involve the rating of students' essays: The New York State Regents Examination in English, which contains from 30% to 50% written responses; the Advanced Placement English Examination (CEEB), which is composed altogether of written essays regarding literature; the new California scheme for testing "equivalency," which is composed of two essays and an objective test. At this time, the College Board continues to debate the use of some form of written examination in connection with their Scholastic Aptitude Test. Until approximately twelve years ago, a writing sample was included in the admissions tests sponsored by the Board, and copies of these samples were sent to institutions selected by the student applicants.

The entire matter of measurement and evaluation of writing may seem tangential to the committee's main concern; yet, there are important related matters (admission, proficiency in English, and remedial English) all of which depend on having appropriate devices and standards by which to gauge student ability and performance. From another point of view, a test which is presumed to cover certain aspects or subjects (whether mathematics, writing, or elementary botany) becomes by its very presence a kind of public definition of that subject. To the degree that the test is not comprehensive or valid, the lack of precision or fit makes the results misleading to everyone. It is the opinion of some that the popular uproar over the deteriorating quality of student writing has been triggered entirely by declining test scores whose validity is suspect.

In any case, what is urgently required in the committee's view is a significantly better (i.e., more valid) test to measure verbal ability and writing performance than the one currently being used. At present students are admitted to the College on the basis of their composite ACT score and high school class rank (a factor of

high school grades). While the ACT appears to measure a number of skills--including arithmetic computation, reading comprehension, a rudimentary knowledge of the natural sciences--the test is a highly superficial one with respect to writing. (A sample question from the ACT English test is included in Appendix D.) As can be seen by reviewing ACT test questions, the student is asked to do a piece of proof reading, to be a kind of editorial sleuth in search of errors. In fact, most of the errors found in the short paragraph items reflect a very limited range of variables--those having to do with the mechanics of publication rather than those dealing with the process of composition.

Given the deficiencies of the ACT English test, the committee recommends two immediate changes. On the one hand, it recommends that the Department of English stop using the English subscore of the ACT as a measure of English proficiency and as a means of placement into Rhetoric 108. Besides its general deficiencies, the exam is also thought by the Rhetoric staff to lack discrimination, particularly among the group of students who are more able writers. On the other hand, the very limited range of the test fails to make it a very sensitive device for admissions purposes. Although the difference may simply be one of degree, the committee favors the adoption of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (CEEB) over the ACT as soon as this change can be accomplished. There are two reasons: The SAT questions involve diction, vocabulary, verbal analogy, and reading; and, along with the new Test of Standard Written English, covers more linguistic territory than the ACT English test. Beyond this important difference, there is serious consideration now being given by the College Board to the use of writing samples (or a written test) to accompany the SAT.

Ideally, a completely original, institutionally (or consortially) prepared examination of writing should be developed, and the committee suggests that the several departments concerned (English, Speech, MARD) should prepare such a test. When it is clear that we are using an appropriate vehicle for gauging writing performance and ability, the committee favors a policy which would set a minimum standard required of all students in the College. Students who do not achieve this minimum score would not be eligible for admission under regular policies, although (as in the case of EOP) students could be admitted under special arrangements or conditions. It was also proposed that the students whose scores fell in a limited range at the threshold of acceptability might be asked to take an additional essay test. Eventually, however, the committee decided that all applicants for admission should be required to take some kind of written examination for entrance.

Other Admissions Factors

Quite apart from their performance on standardized examinations, students are expected to have completed three years of high school English to be admissible to the College and the University. This "pattern requirement" has been on the books for many years; and as late as 1954, the following description of English was noted in the University Bulletin:

> ...only courses in history and appreciation of literature, and in composition (including oral composition when given as part of basic English course) and grammar, will count toward the three units in English required as a measure for admission to all curricula. Four units in English, while not required for any curriculum, are recommended by all the colleges and schools.

Within the last eight or ten years, however, many schools have adopted elective English courses, some of which depart substantially from the above parameter. In the committee's view, some English electives depart so far that they cannot be encompassed in any common definition of English.[13] While the committee believes that the entire content of high school English programs should not be determined by the University or by the English departments of universities, since their clienteles are often substantially different, we do feel that work in English that is presumed to be preparatory to university study should have some reasonable relationship to what is to follow. For this reason the committee recommends that units offered in satisfaction of the English pattern requirement should be comprised of studies in the English language, composition, and literature, and that in all such study significant attention will be given to expository writing. In addition, the committee urges that the College require four years of English rather than three.

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13 As an example of some courses which might be considered to have pushed beyond the legal limits, the following list of electives were noted by a teacher in the April 1972 issue of the English Journal: Romanticism I, The History of the American Novel, The Expanding World of James Joyce, Legal First Aid, Black Dialogue, Yoga I, II, and III, Student Rights and Civil Liberties, Wit and Humor in Literature, Trends in Contemporary Rock Music, Still Photography, Topics in Psychology, and English for the Garrulous.

V. THE REQUIREMENT AND THE COURSES

Background

The College (and each of its antecedent colleges) has maintained a graduation requirement in English composition since 1891, first in a course entitled "Themes and Elocution" and later by a two-semester course in rhetoric or composition. Before 1913--the year the College of Literature and the Arts was combined with the College of Science to form the new College of Liberal Arts and Sciences--students in the Arts College were required to complete 8 hours of English, including literature and rhetoric, whereas students in the College of Science had the option of completing work in literature, history, political science, economics, philosophy, or education. The first semester course (Rhetoric 1) was waived for students who demonstrated superior writing ability, but all students in the College were required to complete Rhetoric 2.

In 1944 students who failed to receive a B in their second semester rhetoric course were required to pass an English qualifying examination to prove that they had minimal competence in writing. If they failed the examination (as some did repeatedly), they were required to take non-credit Rhetoric 200, which was itself a preparation for another round with the qualifying examination. Over a 20 year period, the number of students examined annually ranged from 167 to over 2,700 (in 1963-64). Failure rate on the test ranged from 13.3% (in 1946-47) to 59.1% (in 1964-65). The qualifying examination was abandoned in 1968 upon recommendation of the Senate Committee on Student English which asserted that the test "does not exert the steady and continued pressure on the student to write well that is ncessary for genuine improvement. Nor is the committee convinced that the qualifying examination is valid and reliable."[14] That committee also noted that "the elimination of this device should encourage students, advisors,

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[14] Report of the Urbana-Champaign Senate Committee on Student English, March 11, 1968, V. I. West,

and college deans to assume additional initiative in searching for ways to increase the proficiency of those who need help." The group recommended the expansion of tutorial services through a writing laboratory whose facilities would be "sufficiently diverse that deficiencies can be identified and corrected whether they originate from deficient knowledge of grammar and sentence forms or from more complex psychological or attitudinal problems." The Senate committee also proposed "courses combining rhetoric with subject matter from a specialized area, and a postponement of the second rhetoric course until the junior or senior year."

The next major change in the rhetoric requirement was its reduction as proposed by the Department of English in 1971. The department argued successfully that, based on ACT scores and class rank, students then admitted to the College were more capable than their predecessors; spokesmen also cited the elimination of the requirement in other institutions (such as Wisconsin) or reduction (as at Michigan). It was asserted that the first semester course was a good deal more effective than was Rhetoric 102; moreover, it was argued that a one-semester course could be more effectively taught, supervised, and administered by conscientious and enthusiastic teaching assistants than a drawn-out two-semester offering.

In retrospect it is easy to view the 1971 proposal for an abbreviated rhetoric requirement as being out of keeping with actual student needs. If one is to put credence in reports from the testing agencies, there was an actual rise in student

verbal proficiency in the mid-60's which went into an abrupt decline somewhat before the English Department proposal. Ironically, it would seem now that the reduction in the requirement occurred precisely at that point when the College might better have been considering its extension. It must in fairness be asserted that the tests themselves were (and are) far less sensitive barometers of impending change than we would hope; and for some reason ACT scores were not broken down according to subject area prior to 1969. Moreover, there were other pressures and attitudes prevailing then which might well have influenced the faculty at least as much as the stated arguments. Colleges and universities everywhere were reducing requirements, not only in rhetoric and composition, but also in foreign language and in general education. During the following year, for example, the College of LAS liberalized its general education requirements and once again debated the foreign language requirement.

There are now two main roads which students may use to complete the University rhetoric requirement. The most traveled option is to take one of the two courses offered by the Rhetoric Division, Rhetoric 105, Principles of Composition, 4 hours--or Rhetoric 108, Forms of Composition, 4 hours. Students are now admitted to the latter course on the basis of their performance on the English subtest of the ACT. In both courses the emphasis falls on the methods of exposition and argumentation, and the uses of evidence and style; the main difference between them lies in the fact that Rhetoric 108 is thematically organized, often concentrating on special topics of interest to the instructor and students. By design, neither offering is primarily a course in literature; rather, they emphasize effective expository writing. Although readings are often employed by instructors both to give substance to student writing and to serve as models of particular kinds of writing, current policy says that the readings are essentially corollary to the main effort of the

course. Both courses require a research paper of 10 or 12 pages besides at least half a dozen other papers which are to be written both in and out of class. Instructors are expected to annotate all papers and to have two or three conferences with each student.

Alternative and Complementary Courses

The alternative course, Verbal Communication 111-112, 6 hours, was first devised in the 1930's under the aegis of the Division of General Studies. This offering was transferred from the Division in 1968 to the Department of Speech Communication where it continues as a two-semester course combining both written and oral English. Because of the additional oral component and the two-semester format, Verbal Communication 111-112 is offered for six hours. As with Rhetoric 105 and 108, expository writing is stressed and a research paper is required. For some reason not altogether clear to the committee, the Verbal Communication alternative is not as popular among LAS students as it appears to be f[illegible]chose outside the College. (In the November survey, only 2.3% of LAS seniors indicated that they had met the rhetoric requirement by completing Speech Communication 111-112.)

In principle, the committee agrees that alternative courses ought to be available to students and programs, and it recommends that they continue to be offered by the English and Speech Communication Departments.

Besides the introductory writing courses, the Rhetoric Division offers a writing laboratory (Rhetoric 103) which provides intensive tutoring in basic writing skills for students identified as having special problems. Concurrent registration in Rhetoric or in Verbal Communication is required. An additional course, Rhetoric 104, EOP Rhetoric, 3 hours, continues as a special option for EOP students. This course is regarded as a preliminary to enrollment in Rhetoric 105.

The Rhetoric Division also offers a variety of advanced writing courses including Rhetoric 133, Principles of Composition, 3 hours, and Rhetoric 143,

Intermediate Expository Writing, 3 hours. Writing in different forms and modes (e.g., fiction, drama and poetry) is also offered under the aegis of the Rhetoric Division, and a series of special courses is given by the Division of Business and Technical Writing. If one considers the gamut of offerings available to students, it would seem that the College does in fact provide instruction in sufficient variety to meet the requirements of students who want either to improve their writing prowess generally or to learn the elements of particular kinds of writing. It is not likely, however, that students and program advisors are very much aware of these alternatives.

The effectiveness of the present required courses is very difficult to determine but questionnaire responses (particularly those by students) afford some insight here. Of those students who believed that the quality of their writing had improved since they came to the University (83% of those responding), 11% identified either Rhetoric or Verbal Communication as contributing to that improvement. Students who had taken one of these courses were divided, however, on the degree of helpfulness provided, 54% indicating that the courses had been helpful and the remaining 46% noting that the courses had been of "little or no help." The LAS Senior Questionnaire provides yet another glimpse of how students value the writing courses. Although students were not asked specifically on this questionnaire whether their composition courses were good, poor or indifferent, approximately a hundred students offered their opinions. Of these, 13 were positive, reflecting a view that the course content was good or that the teachers were especially effective. On the other hand, 85 students provided distinctly negative responses concerning their writing courses, most of them offering generalized criticisms but approximately one-third pointing to poor quality of teachers (TA's). There were also suggestions that the course should be made more relevant to the students' own fields of interest--for example, that special sections be organized for students of the sciences or of

those in business studies. It should be noted that the Rhetoric Division has been sensitive to this notion, and that a few sections have already been organized to serve special groups of students, particularly in engineering and in the biological sciences. From the same questionnaire (LAS), a slight majority (59%) of those commenting on the issue favored an extension of the rhetoric requirement, many of them qualifying their recommendation by suggesting some reorientation of the program or some special focus in the course which would be more appropriate to their fields of concentration. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that additional required work in rhetoric is rather low among the student priorities, even though it ranks high among faculty recommendations, particularly from those in the physical and social sciences.

Proposal for a New Course

In any case, the Committee on the Use of English believes that the best course of action now is to develop writing courses at the 200 level in the context of departments or divisional areas. This is much the same recommendation as that made by the Senate Committee on Student English of March, 1968, proposing experimental courses of this kind. The idea is also supported by the present rhetoric staff. An extension of the rhetoric requirement (or strengthening of the requirement) is the second most popular recommendation made by the faculty surveyed last November and the third most frequent recommendation of seniors. The committee urges the immediate development of such courses and the parallel establishment of a junior-level requirement by programs or departments. Where appropriate, related departments (or schools) might offer omnibus writing courses for their majors. Although there were different views expressed in the committee as to the means of developing these courses--some proposing an immediate college-wide requirement and others espousing more evolutionary steps--it is the unanimous opinion of the committee that these courses be established and required, if not by independent units, then by the College. The primary purpose of the new offerings will be to provide

relevant instruction in the method and forms of writing appropriate to given disciplines or sets of disciplines. In consequence, the research paper now included in the curriculum of Rhetoric 105 would be deferred until students take the suggested upper level course, and such papers would therefore be written in the context of their major subject or area.

If a majority of students cannot be served by such courses within a reasonable period (say by 1980), the committee urges the faculty to adopt a college-wide requirement in advanced rhetoric which would be met by completing a comprehensive 200-level course.

VI. STAFFING, ORGANIZATION AND SUPERVISION OF WRITING COURSES

In the early 1930's a recommendation was made to the Senate Educational Policy Committee to convene a Committee on Students' Use of English, but it was not until June, 1941, that the standing Committee on Student English was confirmed. This committee continued to oversee the rhetoric requirement and all its accompanying paraphernalia until 1971, when it was superseded by a Committee to Explore Coordination of Campus Services Dealing with Language Problems. Among the manifold responsibilities of the Senate Committee on Student English were the following:

> To study the operation of the regulations relating to English and bring in such further recommendations as may seem desirable for the improvement of the use of English by students. To review all matters of policy relating to general proficiency examinations, the establishment of upper-class remedial courses, the improvement of speech, the establishment of a writing clinic and a writing laboratory, the publication of a University manual of style, and publication of a statement that a certain standard of English is required for graduation. It is not meant, however, that the Committee on Student English must confine itself to these procedures, it should consider the subject in the broadest way.[15]

A number of these functions were accomplished by the committee over its thirty-year life, including the establishment of the writing laboratory and the writing clinic, the publication of a style manual, and general coordination of proficiency and qualifying examinations. With the end of the qualifying examination and the 200-level remedial program, however, there was less scope for the operation of the committee and consequently the coordinating committee noted above was impaneled.

With the demise of the Senate Committee on Student English, it is assumed that questions of policy and procedure formerly subject to campus-wide review by the Senate Committee were now exercised almost entirely by the units themselves--the Rhetoric Division, the English Department, and the Speech Department. Until recently, the Writing Laboratory has functioned much as a separate entity whose most direct ties were with the Student Services Office and the Educational Opportunity Program. The Writing Clinic, the Speech and Hearing Clinic, and the Reading Program

[15] University Senate File, Chronological Statement.

also seem to be largely autonomous. The Coordinating Committee appointed in 1971 appears not to have provided functional ties between these units nor to make them very visible as independent services or as a group of remedial efforts.

While there can be little question but that the direct responsibility regarding the day-by-day instruction lies with the academic units sponsoring the courses, the Committee on the Use of English believes that policy issues and coordination of writing programs should be handled from a broader base. Such matters as placement or exemption should be subject to thorough scrutiny by an appropriate group--in the absence of a campus committee, by an ad hoc College committee appointed by the Dean. Similarly, continuing or periodic studies of the state of writing in the College should be conducted by a sitting committee composed of representatives from a variety of disciplines, and having a continuing interest in student writing.

The information and communication functions of the campus committee proposed in 1932 are as clearly needed today as then. Indeed, the University has grown substantially in size and complexity in the intervening decades and there now seems even more reason for an appropriate group to have oversight of the many issues and concerns regarding student English, not merely "remedial" matters.

Rhetoric

As noted above, the time honored format of freshman English at the University of Illinois has been a two-semester course in rhetoric or rhetoric and composition. For many years sections of the course have been taught by assistants who were themselves degree candidates in the Department of English, although the Department often employed others (for example, faculty spouses) to augment the graduate student staff. At present freshman rhetoric is staffed entirely by teaching assistants except for the rare occasions when a faculty member requests the

assignment (one or two a year); in addition, seven instructors were employed during the academic year 1975-76, primarily as supervisors of new TA's. Their duties included helping to orient new teachers, holding weekly training sessions, monitoring theme grading, and evaluating classroom teaching.

Since there is such complete dependence on teaching assistants in freshman rhetoric, there is more than ordinary turnover in the staff. Although several recent directors have made attempts to bring stability to the course by organizing a coherent syllabus, by providing for a brief orientation program for new assistants, and by arranging for periodic supervision, the fact is that most teaching assistants are largely on their own, particularly after their initial assignment. Within recent years, as many as 35 new assistants have been assigned by the department, most of whom had no previous teaching experience.

In the course of its deliberations, the committee met with a group of rhetoric assistants (those within the instructor/supervisor group) and from that session came to believe that these experienced and selected individuals were highly competent and professional in their work. Nevertheless, it was clear as well that the teaching of composition was for them a temporary career rather than a professional calling. When better jobs were available--that is, positions calling for the teaching of literature--virtually all of these individuals would unhesitatingly abandon the teaching of composition courses.

Without intending to denigrate the abilities or the potential qualities of any of the teaching assistants, the committee does question the present system whereby instruction in freshman composition is relegated entirely to teaching assistants. While the committee recognizes the economic difficulty of providing senior staff to teach all sections of rhetoric (there are well over a hundred each semester), the complete division of the English faculty in this regard is most unfortunate.

Although similar practices persist in many large state universities, there is reason to believe that the preponderant, if not exclusive, use of teaching assistants to staff freshman composition courses is carried to an extreme at Illinois. Reporting on this very feature of freshman composition courses based on his survey of 1967, Professor Thomas W. Wilcox cites the Urbana ratio of 1-30 (i.e., one faculty member for 30 assistants). In 1975-76 the ratio was even higher. Wilcox decries this tendency to staff the freshman composition course with teaching assistants as follows:

> Such over dependence on--or exploitation of--teaching assistants may have unfortunate consequences at both ends of the department's curriculum: Its freshman program comes to rely on its graduate program for inexpensive manpower, and its graduate program is subsidized to a large degree by its freshman program. Neither program benefits from this unhealthy relationship; in a certain sense each preys on the other.[16]

By comparing the number of instructional units (enrollments x credit hours) derived from freshman rhetoric with those from English courses, one can get another perspective on the level of faculty commitment towards the composition courses in the department. In the fall of 1975, 9,878 instructional units came from freshman rhetoric courses; English (i.e., literature) courses generated 16,261 instructional units. In other words, approximately one-third of the department's total teaching effort is directed to freshman rhetoric, and towards this enterprise only one professorial assignment is currently made. There may be good arguments in defense of the present staffing situation; nevertheless, the unfortunate inference to be drawn from the present schemes is that in the hierarchy of courses freshman composition is an inferior and unrewarding task. Moreover, the dependence on an ever-changing staff of assistants breeds constant flux and shifting goals. While the committee believes that the task of improving writing throughout the College is not

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[16]Thomas W. Wilcox, The Anatomy of College English, (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1973), p. 66.

an exclusive burden of the Department of English, or the Department of Speech Communication, we believe that the special responsibility given these departments should not be delegated to special, autonomous units, but rather embraced by the department as a whole. And if a department is an appropriate home for basic instruction in written composition, it should be possible to find senior faculty willing to participate in this activity. This is not to say that every member of the department ought to teach freshman composition every semester (nor that every member should necessarily teach a section on a given schedule); yet, we believe that some systematic use of regular faculty--perhaps on a voluntary basis--would infuse a better sense of continuity in the program and would also have the advantage of providing experience and interest where it is vitally needed. If few faculty outside the regular divisional staff are qualified or interested in this work, a serious question is raised concerning the proper location of the writing programs. We believe that, at a very minimum, the equivalent of three full-time professors should be committed to the program. Those occupying these positions should be appropriately rewarded by promotion and salary increases on the basis of their performance. Criteria for both should include research and publication in areas germane to the writing program.

In addition to the above recommendations, the committee believes that continuity and expertise in the course would be further promoted if a limited number of special appointments could be made in the freshman writing program. Although there are obvious pitfalls lying in this direction, we believe that a special cadre of instructors might be hired on the basis of their training, interest, and experience to teach composition for extended terms.

Actually, the committee was impressed with the apparent success of the large enterprise known as freshman rhetoric given the meager support it appears to have

for its administration and control. Members inferred, however, that the present health of the program was owing primarily to the extraordinary efforts of a few individuals who seem to give a great deal more by way of service to the program than they receive in tangible rewards.

In effect, the coordination of freshman rhetoric is a job which must be regarded as more demanding and, quite probably, more frustrating than the task of running many smaller departments in the College. During the 1975-76 academic year, total enrollments were 4,836; the number of instructors averaged 85 per semester and sections numbered 250. The director must be responsible for the assignment of instructors, their supervision and training, and their final evaluation. He conducts supervisory class visits, consults with instructors on their teaching, and, of course, reviews all policies relative to syllabi, textbooks, course requirements, grading standards, placement and proficiency. In addition, the director is expected to determine budgetary and staff needs and to develop the time table. As might be imagined from such a large program, office and telephone traffic is extensive. Beyond these more or less routine activities, the director is expected to participate in (and often to direct) articulation conferences for high school and junior college teachers and to conduct off-campus workshops. In addition, the director conducts a three-day orientation program for new assistants in August and subsequently manages a weekly in-service program for new TA's. The present director serves as Treasurer of the Illinos Association for Teachers of English. Except for some assistance from the Director of Undergraduate Studies and a group of part-time, temporary instructors, the director has somehow to manage this work on his own; and, if promotion is wanted, to do teaching and research in literary areas. It must be concluded that such an administrative organization is both enormously complicated and frighteningly dependent on the energy and

the will of the incumbent director to make personal and professional sacrifices for the good of the program. The committee therefore believes that the freshman rhetoric program needs substantial support simply to maintain its present status.

Of as much concern to the committee as the general staffing of writing courses was the present policy of appointing the director of freshman rhetoric. Within the last half dozen years, the program has been served by four directors. Although the goals and procedures of freshman rhetoric appear now to have become stabilized, it is not difficult to understand why some of our colleagues have challenged the program from time to time on the basis of a perceived change of direction. In our view, the effort needs constant, professional leadership; and this kind of leadership can be realized only when the position is given credibility and prestige. Fortunately or not, these qualities are conferred in the University context only with academic rank. The committee therefore strongly recommends that the department consider the directorship as a major appointment, to be given only to individuals who are themselves committed to the enterprise. In making this recommendation, the committee does not mean to derrogate any individual director, past or present; but the system of appointing non-tenured directors (twice within the last three vacancies) is seriously challenged.

In this regard, the committee asserts that the direction and administration of a program as large and important as this one should have proper rewards and incentives. It is unfair and unwise, in the committee's view, to weigh literary scholarship in one scale and scholarship in writing in another. Therefore, the accomplishments of those who serve this program (both in teaching and in research) should be given full weight and measure in all actions involving promotion and tenure.

Whether it is because of the many variables involved in learning and teaching how to write effectively; whether we simply lack appropriate devices by which to measure the quality of writing, or whether scholarship and research in this area is thought to be of little prestige, the fact is that there is very little research extant on the teaching of writing. Nevertheless, we believe that there is a great deal to be learned from what is, after all, one of the most important subjects in all of one's education. At the very least we should have some better idea than we now have regarding the optimal kind of course or courses to be offered or required by the College, particularly for those of varying levels of ability and achievement. We should also know a good deal more than we now do about the growth or deterioration of student writing ability over the four-year span of undergraduate education. An often-mentioned recommendation of faculty members on the November survey is the use of a writing examination to be passed by all students before graduation. Such a requirement would, however, be similar to the earlier scheme of a qualifying examination abandoned by faculty in 1968; and until some fundamental questions regarding test validity can be resolved, it seems to the committee that the imposition of another such examination would not necessarily promote improved writing. All of these matters require assiduous scholarship; but given the staffing policies now in effect, both in rhetoric and verbal communication, and the lack of incentive through promotion, it is not likely that necessary research in writing can be accomplished.

Our English Department has had a long tradition of association with the English departments of schools throughout the State. The Illinois Association of Teachers of English is directly sponsored by the department, which helps to organize its annual meeting for many years held on the campus. A member of the English Department has served regularly as editor of the Illinois English Bulletin, the official publication of the Association, and two members of the staff have served

IATE as Treasurer and Executive Secretary. Beyond these services, the department has held articulation conferences to which representatives from many schools in the state are invited. During the last year the program's director (and previous director) attended some twenty workshops. The committee applauds these efforts, though once again it would suggest that the articulation programs involve more direct participation by more members of the department. We believe that these efforts should be more than ceremonial; they should for the most part be cooperative working sessions in which basic policies and practices regarding the teaching of composition and literature are studied.

As mentioned above, the former Senate Committee on Student English, in cooperation with the Rhetoric Division, did prepare a guide and style sheet which was subsequently sent to each faculty member in the University. With the varying standards that now appear to be imposed by different disciplines and individuals, we believe that it is time again to develop a new set of guidelines, probably in the form of a style sheet. Given the varieties of style in use by different disciplines, the most useful guide would reflect these differences. It was suggested in committee that the document could be inserted into the Academic Staff Handbook; and it could certainly be contained (perhaps in an abridged form) in the LAS Student Handbook.

Beyond these suggestions and recommendations, the rest must be exhortation.

As noted throughout this report, we firmly believe that, whatever has been revealed by test scores and statistics, there is a serious need to improve student writing in the College. It is not enough simply to require another course, although we do believe that the basic requirement should return to the six-hour standard of many years. Much more importantly in our view is the difficult task of raising our own sights and our own consciousness. At the least, we believe that

there should be a great many more opportunities than exist now for students to write directly, coherently, and persuasively on subjects of their interest. We believe that instructors should be making much more extensive use of written English on student reports, papers, and examinations. From the questionnaire responses received by the committee, it appears that many students and faculty believe that writing is of little value outside an academic context. We believe this view is in error. Although exceptions occur, it seems self-evident that the future of professionals and managers, as well as scholars, will be greatly enhanced if they are able to write accurately, forcefully, and gracefully. We suggest that placement offices at all levels publicize the fact that literate candidates for virtually all professional or commercial positions will be given better opportunities than those who are not.

Indeed, mere literacy is too little to ask of our graduates. We therefore believe that those students who exhibit special ability and distinction in writing, whatever their disciplines might be, ought to be rewarded appropriately. At one level, this will probably mean that students who are more able to formulate problems in words and crystalize their thinking in precise writing will probably be graded higher than those who cannot. At another level, we would propose that departments, or other teaching units, offer periodic competitions, especially to commend projects of special merit to reward students of exceptional ability.

Finally, though the subcommittee report speaks more directly than we can to matters regarding remedial programs, the Committee on the Use of English recommends that the several efforts involving remedial or developmental writing should be defined and publicized. While we believe that the other recommendations made in this report will, if implemented, improve the general quality of writing in the College, we are aware that many students have individual writing problems, most of

which can best be helped by such programs as the Writing Laboratory or the Writing Clinic. But the clientele for all such special efforts is that group of students who need special help, regardless of their fields of concentration and in spite of the reasons for their deficiencies.

A great deal more might be said, but the essence of the committee's work lies in the recommendations which follow. Much needs to be done, and the committee has proposed a number of remedies, many of which we would agree are not easily accomplished. The most difficult of all is the transformation of opinion and the acceptance of responsibility by all students and all faculty for the improvement of writing in the College. It will not do simply to relegate this important task to a single department, to a division within the department, or to a special course. Unless the academic community which we know as the College values good writing, there is little logic in having any requirement in writing, nor is there point in assigning blame to other institutions.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Entrance Procedure and Requirements

1. Beginning as soon as possible, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences should require four units of high school English (rather than three). Work offered to meet this requirement in English ought to be comprised of studies in language, composition, and literature; and in all such work significant attention should be given to expository writing.

2. Candidates for admission to the College should submit verbal scores from the Scholastic Aptitude Test rather than the test developed by the American College Testing Program. In addition, applicants should present writing samples on at least two topics. These compositions are to be written under examination conditions when students take the comprehensive entrance test. These samples will be reviewed and assessed by readers under certain circumstances, i.e., where students have marginal admissions qualifications.

3. A minimum score on the verbal portion(s) of the required admission test should be determined, and no candidate would be admitted who does not meet this minimal requirement. (In individual cases, however, writing samples may counsel admission decisions. Those students now admitted under special procedures [such as EOP] would not be affected by this screen.)

B. Course Requirements

1. The basic college course in composition ought to be the four-hour course now taught in the English Department (Rhetoric 105) or the six-hour, two-semester courses taught in the Speech Communications Department (Speech Communications 111-112).

2. The present freshman rhetoric course should be modified as follows:
   a. The research paper and much of the bibliographic materials now covered in Rhetoric 105 and 108 should be removed (see #5 below).
   b. The rubric for the present course should be changed (from Rhetoric) to reflect its primary concern (e.g., English Composition or College Writing).
3. The present policy of exempting students on the basis of ACT English usage scores should be discontinued at once. Only students who have satisfactorily completed a college-level course, such as Advanced Placement English or an equivalent course taught in another college or university, should be exempt from the composition requirement.
4. At least three "tracks" of the freshman composition course should be offered through the English Department, and students should be placed into the sections that fit their abilities and purposes.
5. Writing courses appropriate to particular disciplines (or related disciplines) should be developed with the primary objective of instructing students in the writing of research papers and reports. Although the main emphasis of these courses would be on the methodology and procedures appropriate to the field of concentration (or broad area), a further aim is the general improvement of expository writing. Towards these ends it is recommended that the courses be developed cooperatively between faculty in the respective departments and specialists in the Department of English. (The majority of the committee favors the imposition of a second-level College requirement for all students in the Science and Letters curricula who enter the University in the fall of 1977 and thereafter.)

C. Organization and Administration of Writing Courses

1. Basic composition courses should continue to be administered by the Departments of English and Speech Communications.

2. A more stable organizational basis for the freshman rhetoric program should be provided, and to this end a substantial increase in support ought to be given by the Department or the College.

   a. At least 3.0 professorial FTE should be committed to the program. Individuals occupying these positions should be on the tenure track and should be rewarded by promotion and appropriate salary increases on the basis of their performance. Criteria for promotion should include research and publication in areas relevant to the interests of the program.

   b. The possibility of developing a cadre of teachers to assist in the supervision and coordination of the program should be seriously explored. These persons need not be on the tenure track; if not, they would have a reasonable assurance of long-term employment, given good performance.

   c. The position of Director of Freshman Rhetoric should be considered as a major appointment in the Department to be given only to those who can give leadership to this enterprise over a reasonable period.

3. Although the verbal communication program in Speech Communications is currently much smaller than freshman rhetoric, additional support for its administration and supervision should be seriously considered. As in freshman rhetoric, promotion should depend on research and publication as well as on teaching and administrative effectiveness.

4. Both departments should implement the following recommendations:

   a. The orientation, training and close supervision of instructors should be continued and expanded. First year teaching assistants should meet with a supervisor regularly; their classes ought to be visited several times during a semester and their grading of assigned papers reviewed by a senior staff member.

   b. Both departments should assign interested and qualified faculty to teach in the respective writing programs from time to time.

   c. Research in the teaching of writing should be encouraged and periodic studies of the effectiveness of writing programs should be conducted.

   d. Present articulation programs with English departments in the state should be expanded and enriched, and workshops and summer institutes for teachers of writing should be organized. Support for these activities will need to be found both locally and from outside sources.

   e. A guide and style sheet which can be used by faculty and students throughout the College should be developed. (Ideally, several should be composed to accommodate differing modes and requirements of the different disciplinary areas.)

5. A college-level committee should be appointed to monitor the required writing programs in the Departments of Speech Communications and English and to provide liaison with other units in the College or the University.

D. General Policies

1. More extensive use of written English on student reports, papers and examinations should be encouraged by the College and by all departments. Annual reports from departments should include statements summarizing efforts undertaken to improve the quantity and quality of student writing.
2. Departments and Schools should conduct competitions to reward students for writing of special merit and distinction.
3. Placement officers should emphasize the importance of good writing to students in all fields.
4. Appropriate college officials, in consultation with the units involved, should define precisely the scope and purpose of all remedial or developmental writing activities and these should be widely publicized.

VIII THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY--TECHNICAL REPORT

Data and Methods

Data used in the analysis were obtained by mailing separate self-administered survey questionnaires to faculty and to a representative sample of undergraduate students. From the College's enrollment lists, 420 potential respondents were randomly selected from all seniors to receive questionnaires by mail; questionnaires were also distributed to all faculty members of professorial rank (750). In all, data were collected from 123 seniors and 282 faculty members, yielding response rates of 29 and 38 percent. Admittedly, these response rates are lower than many recent surveys of university populations, yet not unexpectedly so, given constraints involving the time of mailing, the committee's desire to use the results quickly (precluding follow up requests), and the varying interest in the problem addressed in the survey.

Since students were asked to indicate their academic majors and faculty to note their departmental affiliations, we were able to assess the representativeness of the distribution of our respondents across major divisions of the College. By and large divisions are proportionally represented by returns from students and faculty, although in both samples, the physical science groups are somewhat underrepresented.

Table H

Major Divisional Affiliation and Corresponding Response Rates, in Percents

Major Division	Faculty Proportion/Division	Faculty Response	Senior Proportion/Division	Senior Response
Humanities	38%	42%	21%	25%
Biological Sciences	13	17	27	26
Physical Sciences	29	20	20	16
Social Sciences	20	21	32	33

We believe that, particularly among faculty members, the difference in response rates obtained in our survey probably reflects patterns of varying interest in and professional concern with the subject matter of the questionnaire itself, namely,

the observed deterioration of writing abilities among current undergraduate students. Accordingly, we also believe that generalizations based upon the survey results presented here must be approached with some degree of circumspection, and that the results are useful primarily as hypotheses for further research rather than as absolute statements of general trends in senior and faculty perceptions of the quality of student writing, the causes of the problems perceived or specific recommendations. Caution is warranted, then, in deriving generalizations from these findings due to limitations in sample size and, additionally, to a possible bias familiar to many survey designs whereby those individuals believing a "problem" to exist--however defined--are most likely to respond.

Questionnaires administered to both faculty and senior respondents closely adhered to orthodox social science survey design with respect to general format, question syntax, and the structuring and wording of response alternatives. Since parsimony, anonymity, and immediate relevance to the practical concerns of the committee were the principal criteria informing the design of the study, many of the customany demographic questions (age, sex, race or ethnicity, socioeconomic background characteristics, etc.) were omitted in the final drafts of the questionnaires which appear in Appendix A. Because a substantial number of open-ended questions and low response rates are, in general, known to be highly correlated, we decided to resort to closed and precoded, rather than open-ended questions, except in those instances where it was hoped more detailed information could be acquired. General topics addressed in the questionnaires included depth of exposure to written assignments, perceptions of the influence of quality writing in coursework and future professional life, sentiments regarding efforts by the student's or faculty member's major department to improve student writing ability, changes in the writing ability of students, and specific recommendations to the department or College. Wherever

possible, a similar format between faculty and senior versions of the questionnaire schedule was maintained allowing student-faculty comparisons on many items.

A departure from the overall similarity of structure of the two questionnaires was warranted in several instances. The first two concerned additional information required of senior respondents but not of faculty. Specifically, the student was asked to indicate the method used to satisfy the University general rhetoric requirement, i.e., whether he or she completed one of the courses designated as meeting this requirement (Rhetoric 101-102, Rhetoric 105 or 108, or Speech 111 112), took a transfer course, or was exempted via a proficiency examination. Students were also asked to recall a course or instructor they felt had significantly contributed to an improvement in their writing style and quality and, subsequently, to list aspects seen as responsible for this contribution. Finally, we asked faculty members--but not senior respondents--to evaluate the writing quality of current undergraduate students compared with that of the "typical student" enrolled five or six years ago. Subject to the aforementioned qualifications, this item indicates approximately the visibility of the issue of deteriorating student writing quality among faculty in the College. When asked to compare current and past undergraduate writing quality, about half (50.4 percent) of the faculty responded that the writing ability of today's student is either "somewhat worse" or "significantly worse" than prior students. Conversely, nearly half believe that current undergraduates are "about the same" or better than former students with respect to writing ability.

A preliminary strategy in the data analysis involved an assessment of actual distributions and corresponding percentages on questionnaire items, computed separately for senior and faculty samples. Next, some general comparisons were made between faculty and student responses to all items jointly asked of both. Subsequently, for both faculty and seniors, separate analyses were undertaken by crosstabulating the most important items with major divisional affiliation

(Humanities, Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences), noting resulting percentage breakdown. Finally, we extended this analysis by comparing responses of individuals majoring in, or teaching in, those departments which actually teach writing skills (English, Rhetoric, and Speech Communication) with individuals affiliated with all other departments. This distinction is reflected in the reference to "Writing Department" and "Other" in Appendix "B."

Major Findings of the Survey

General Comparison of Student and Faculty Responses

There were several noteworthy similarities between the collective responses of students and faculty. On the question of previous departmental effort to upgrade student writing quality, for example, both students (84%) and faculty (82%) feel that little or nothing has been done. A majority of both students (65.9%) and faculty (60%) believe that the writing ability of the typical student improves after his or her matriculation at the University. Only a small group of students (14.6%) and faculty (12.9%) bear witness to deterioration in any degree. Finally, there appears to be substantial agreement among both students and faculty over what might be done to improve the quality of student writing; repeatedly, respondents from each group recommended (a) the reorientation or extension of the rhetoric requirement; (b) more written assignments instead of multiple choice examinations; and (c) shifting the focus of instruction to include more criticism and commentary on student writing.

Nonetheless, student and faculty respondents disagreed on several issues. In typical courses at the 100-, 200-, and 300-levels, for example, students note that they have written fewer papers than the faculty claim to have required, a finding which persists through each of the divisions of the College. Conversely, students claim to have written longer papers than faculty believe they have required. Also,

faculty claim that their mid-term and final examinations require substantially more in terms of written response than students felt had been required of them.

An interesting paradox emerges on the question of writing ability as a criterion influencing final course grades. Students (22.5%) much more than faculty (10.4%) view their writing skill as a factor influencing their final grades; conversely, relatively few faculty (22.9%) cite content alone as a criterion in evaluating student performance, while a large number of students (41.7%) believe that it is. Faculty (85%) believe that writing ability will have a considerable or major effect on a student's professional future far more than do students (56.3%) themselves; and while faculty are more apt to mention the possible adverse effect of poor writing on scholarly work and collegial communication, students seem more concerned over general writing competence. Finally, very few students (1%) recommend increasing admission standards as a means of improving writing quality, while a number of faculty (15.8%) regard this as a potential corrective.

Intra-Faculty Comparisons

An effort was made to distinguish between faculty respondents from four divisions of the College--the Humanities, Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences and the Social Sciences. The results indicate several substantial differencss. In typical courses at all levels, for example, the social sciences faculty consistently assign fewer papers than other divisions; humanities instructors, on the other hand, show a tendency to require longer papers. There seems to be considerable variation in the emphasis upon written response in mid-term and final examinations. And finally there is substantial variation in the proportion of a typical course grade determined by writing quality, ranging from the humanities (29.6%) down to the social (10.3%), biological (9.9%) and physical sciences (5.1%).

There seems to be general agreement among the various divisions over the criteria used to evaluate writing quality; typically, these were noted as the mechanics

of grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc., followed by responses pointing toward overall style and content. But the divisions seem to disagree over the degree of the writing "problem" and its proper corrective. Those respondents in the humanities, for example, were virtually unanimous (98.2%) in recommending departmental or college-level intervention to improve student writing quality, while over a third (34.7%) of those in the physical sciences recommend that no action be taken. Apparently related to this is the fact that physical scientists are substantially less likely (10.9%) than their counterparts to regard writing ability as a major influence on a student's professional future.

Those faculty members affiliated with departments which teach writing courses are more apt to claim that the writing of the typical student improves during his or her stay at the University (72.2%). Conversely, the same "writing department" faculty tend to view current undergraduates as worse writers than previous students; and this view was shared, though less strongly, by other departments as well. Finally, "writing department" faculty are twice as likely as other faculty to recommend the reorientation or extension of the rhetoric requirement as a potential corrective. This group is also markedly less prone than other faculty members to recommend more stringent admissions standards (1.5% vs. 8.8%).

Intra-Student Comparisons

There appear to be substantial differences among students as well as faculty among the various divisions of the College. The number of papers required in a typical course, for example, varies noticeably, with students majoring in the social sciences claiming they have written substantially fewer papers than other students, while those in the humanities claim to have written substantially more. Students in the humanities feel that a larger proportion of written response is required in their examinations, and they also consider writing ability to be a major determinant (70%) in their final course grade. Physical science students believe overwhelmingly

(69%) that their faculty evaluate student writing on only content-related criteria; this sharply conflicts with the fact that only a small number of physical science faculty members (18%) claim to employ content alone as the means of writing evaluation.

The principal method of satisfying the LAS rhetoric requirement also differs according to division. Very few students in the humanities (2%), for example, have satisfied this requirement through a proficiency examination, while nearly a third (32%) of the physical science majors have done so. Moreover, students who took a prescribed course to satisfy the rhetoric requirement consistently (79%) reported that the quality of their writing had improved since matriculating at the University; conversely, nearly a third (30%) of the transfer students and even more (40%) of the proficiency students stated that their writing had deteriorated. Over a fourth (26%) of the social science majors have noted deterioration in the quality of their writing since entering the University.

There are substantial differences across divisions in students' perceptions of the future importance of writing ability. Predictably, students in the humanities consistently (82%) view writing skill as a considerable or major influence on their future, while scarcely a quarter (26%) of those in the physical sciences feel that their writing ability per se will affect their professional careers. Those students majoring in departments which teach writing courses are more likely than are students in other departments to stress personal, social, and non-career aspects of the future thus affected.

Finally, there are substantial differences among the divisions on the question of potential correctives to student writing disabilities. Students in the biological and social sciences, for example, most consistently recommend more writing

assignments, while those in the humanities place more stress on the reorientation and extension of the rhetoric requirement and generally upgrading the quality of writing instruction. Students who have satisfied the rhetoric requirement through proficiency examinations are far more likely than others to recommend more written assignments as a potential corrective, but far less likely than others to recommend reorientation or extension of the rhetoric requirement.

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES - UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
294 Lincoln Hall

Appendix A

COMMITTEE ON THE USE OF ENGLISH
FACULTY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How many papers are required in a typical undergraduate course which you have recently taught at the following levels?

	Department	Course Number	Approximate Number of Papers
100 Level	_____	_____	_____
200 Level	_____	_____	_____
300 Level	_____	_____	_____

2. What is the approximate average length of these papers? (Circle appropriate number)

	Department	Course	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	Over 15
100 Level	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
200 Level	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
300 Level	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5	6

Describe a typical assignment--or attach a sample assignment sheet if you wish.

3. With regard to examinations (mid-term and final) given in the courses cited above, please note the approximate proportion of each which require written responses of at least paragraph length: (Circle appropriate number)

	0-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%
Mid-Term (or typical hourly exam)					
100 Level	1	2	3	4	5
200 Level	1	2	3	4	5
300 Level	1	2	3	4	5
Final					
100 Level	1	2	3	4	5
200 Level	1	2	3	4	5
300 Level	1	2	3	4	5

4. In the courses noted above, approximately what proportion of the student's final grade is determined by the quality of his or her writing? (Please estimate %)

_____%

Please note below any criteria which you employ in evaluating the quality of writing on a student's paper or examination.

5. In your judgment, to what extent is the professional future of a typical student in your field affected by the quality of his or her writing?

Little Influence	Some Influence	Considerable Influence	Major Influence
1	2	3	4

What particular aspects in the professional life of a typical student do you feel will be affected by the quality of his or her writing? (Please describe)

6. In general, how would you compare the writing ability of present undergraduate students with that of former students (of 5 or 6 years ago)?

Significantly Better	Somewhat Better	About the same	Somewhat Worse	Significantly Worse
1	2	3	4	5

7. How much has your department (or division) done to improve the quality of student writing? (Circle appropriate number)

Nothing	Very Little	Quite a Lot	A Great Deal
1	2	3	4

Please note what your department has done in this regard: (Use back of page if more space is required.)

8. In your judgment, how has the writing quality of a typical undergraduate student in your field changed during his or her stay at the University?

Greatly Improved	Somewhat Improved	Unchanged	Somewhat Deteriorated	Greatly Deteriorated
1	2	3	4	5

Please list reasons which you believe may account for any change.

9. Do you believe any special efforts ought to be undertaken by the department or the College to improve the quality of student writing?

Yes _____
No _____

What would you suggest: (Use additional pages if you wish.

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COMMITTEE ON THE USE OF ENGLISH
SENIOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Please note your social security number and major (field of concentration).

SS#_____ _____
Major

1. About how many papers have you been required to write in a typical course in your major department at each of the following levels?

	Department	Course Number	Approximate Number of Papers in Each Course
100 Level	_____	_____	_____
200 Level	_____	_____	_____
300 Level	_____	_____	_____

2. What was the approximate average length of your papers in these courses? Circle appropriate number)

	Department	Course	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	Over 15
100 Level	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
200 Level	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
300 Level	_____	_____	1	2	3	4	5	6

3. With regard to examinations (mid-term or finals) taken in the above courses, please indicate the approximate percentage of each which required written responses of at least paragraph length. (Circle appropriate number)

	0-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%
Mid-term (or typical hourly exam)					
100 Level	1	2	3	4	5
200 Level	1	2	3	4	5
300 Level	1	2	3	4	5
Final					
100 Level	1	2	3	4	5
200 Level	1	2	3	4	5
300 Level	1	2	3	4	5

4. Looking back on a typical course in your major, approximately what percentage of your grade was determined by the quality of your writing? (Give % estimate)

_____%

From your observation, what criteria do instructors use to evaluate the quality of your writing? (Please describe:)

5. In your opinion, how much has your major department done to improve the quality of written English among its students? (Circle appropriate number)

Nothing	Very Little	Quite a Lot	A Great Deal
1	2	3	4

Please briefly describe what your department has done in this area: (Use back of page if more space is required.)

6. Please note below any course or instructor (inside or outside of your major department) that you feel has contributed to an improvement in your writing style and quality.

Course_____ Title_____

Instructor_____

In your opinion what aspects of the course or practices of the instructor contributed to this improvement.

7. Which course did you take to satisfy the University's rhetoric requirement? (Circle appropriate number)

Rhetoric 101-102	Rhetoric 105 or 108	Speech 111-112	Transfer Course (other college)	Proficiency (AP, Dept. Prof.)
1	2	3	4	5

In your judgment how helpful was the course noted above in preparing you for the writing assignments given at the University? (Circle appropriate number)

Extremely helpful	Of some Help	Of Little Help	Of No Help
1	2	3	4

8. How would you characterize any change in the quality of your writing since you came to the University. (Circle appropriate number)

Greatly Improved	Somewhat Improved	Unchanged	Somewhat Deteriorated	Greatly Deterio
1	2	3	4	5

If the quality of your writing has changed, what have been the primary causes?

9. To what extent will the quality of your writing influence your academic or professional future? (Circle appropriate number)

Little Influence	Moderate Influence	Considerable Influence	Major Influence
1	2	3	4

What aspects of your future do you feel will be most affected by the quality of your writing? (Please describe:)

10. From your point of view what might be done by the department or the college to improve the general quality of student writing? (Attach additional pages if you wish.)

STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF FACULTY AND SENIOR QUESTIONNAIRES

How many papers are required in a typical undergraduate course at the following levels:

(FQ 1) which you have recently taught? in your major department? (SQ 1)

	n = 282 FACULTY			n = 123 SENIORS		
Courses	Mean	Median	% "None"	Mean	Median	% "None"
100 Level	2.51	1.47	34.2%	1.41	.71	43.6%
200 Level	2.62	1.55	19.6	1.55	.86	39.8
300 Level	2.49	1.42	15.9	1.59	1.13	28.1
Breakdown by LAS Division and by Writing Departments and Others						
100 Level						
Humanities	3.26	2.68		2.38	1.38	
Biological Sciences	1.30	.33		1.80	.30	
Physical Sciences	2.74	.40		.88	.15	
Social Sciences	1.19	.43		.68	.68	
Writing Departments	4.15	3.21		3.77	4.00	
Others	2.04	.82		1.09	.52	
200 Level						
Humanities	3.58	2.29		2.62	2.00	
Biological Sciences	1.36	.50		1.69	.43	
Physical Sciences	3.40	2.00		.69	.17	
Social Sciences	.78	.73		.91	.75	
Writing Departments	4.52	2.44		3.31	3.20	
Others	2.07	1.24		1.30	.64	
300 Level						
Humanities	3.05	1.97		2.20	1.79	
Biological Sciences	2.83	1.43		1.46	.72	
Physical Sciences	2.41	.92		1.00	.44	
Social Sciences	1.41	1.15		1.46	1.22	
Writing Departments	4.23	2.33		2.54	2.38	
Others	2.19	1.30		1.47	1.00	

(FQ 2)	FACULTY						SENIORS						(SQ 2)
	What is the approximate average length of these papers? (in typed pages)												
Courses	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	15+	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	15+	
100 Level	17%	55%	16%	9%	3%	1%	11%	44%	23%	16%	--	7%	
200 Level	14	33	21	14	9	8	10	24	24	27	7	8	
300 Level	6	21	14	23	12	24	10	17	16	26	15	17	
Breakdown by LAS Division and by Writing Departments and Others													
100 Level													
Humanities	15%	61%	14%	4%	2%	2%	18%	44%	19%	15%	--	4%	
Biological Science	40	40	--	20	--	--	--	44	22	22	--	11	
Physical Science	27	55	9	9	--	--	50	50	--	--	--	--	
Social Science	--	33	33	25	8	--	--	42	33	17	--	8	
Writing Depts	15	65	15	4	--	--	15	69	15	1	--	--	
Others	18	49	16	12	4	2	10	37	26	20	--	8	
200 Level													
Humanities	15	41	20	13	7	5	11	30	26	26	4	3	
Biological Science	22	33	11	11	11	11	17	33	25	17	--	8	
Physical Science	50	25	25	--	--	--	--	25	25	--	--	50	
Social Science	--	6	31	25	19	19	5	11	21	42	16	5	
Writing Depts	13	50	21	4	13	--	--	45	39	16	--	--	
Others	15	27	21	18	8	11	12	18	20	31	8	10	
300 Level													
Humanities	8	22	16	24	13	17	11	19	7	22	30	12	
Biological Science	7	36	19	19	10	10	25	31	25	19	--	--	
Physical Science	9	27	14	36	--	14	13	25	--	13	--	49	
Social Science	2	4	7	18	18	52	--	7	23	36	13	23	
Writing Depts	3	20	23	23	17	13	15	15	15	16	31	8	
Others	7	21	12	23	11	26	9	17	16	28	12	18	

	FACULTY (FQ 3)					SENIORS (SQ 3)				
With regard to examinations in the above courses, please indicate the approximate percentage of each which required written responses of at least paragraph length.	0-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%	0-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%
Midterm Examinations										
100 Level	51%	10%	8%	4%	27%	34%	13%	6%	13%	34%
200 Level	30	13	11	11	35	17	8	13	12	50
300 Level	22	10	9	9	50	14	10	7	12	57
100 Level										
Humanities	14%	14%	7%	7%	59%	11%	7%	4%	22%	57%
Biological Sciences	64	5	9	5	18	44	11	11	11	23
Physical Sciences	71	12	6	--	12	70	22	4	--	4
Social Sciences	61	10	10	2	17	42	17	8	8	25
Writing Departments	8	15	8	--	69	9	13	4	26	48
Others	56	9	8	4	22	42	13	6	9	30
200 Level										
Humanities	4	7	4	7	78	8	3	8	16	66
Biological Sciences	41	10	28	7	14	7	21	29	--	43
Physical Sciences	43	21	--	14	21	67	17	--	17	--
Social Sciences	36	15	6	15	27	36	12	20	8	24
Writing Departments	8	--	--	8	85	13	4	13	17	52
Others	33	14	12	11	29	19	9	13	11	49
300 Level										
Humanities	3	3	3	3	87	7	4	4	7	78
Biological Sciences	37	3	17	17	27	17	11	17	11	43
Physical Sciences	41	18	12	--	29	37	30	5	14	14
Social Sciences	15	15	8	10	53	4	2	4	20	70
Writing Departments	8	--	--	--	92	7	--	7	7	78
Others	23	11	11	10	45	15	11	7	13	54

Percentage of Writing on Final Examinations

(FQ 3 cont)

Final Examinations	FACULTY 0-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%	SENIORS 0-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%
100 Level	52%	8%	6%	5%	29%	31%	14%	5%	13%	37%
200 Level	30	11	9	12	38	17	6	12	14	52
300 Level	25	7	5	10	53	12	11	7	12	58
100 Level										
Humanities	13	14	3	7	62	8	6	4	22	60
Biological Sciences	64	5	--	9	23	50	10	10	10	20
Physical Sciences	77	6	6	--	11	70	22	4	--	4
Social Sciences	71	7	12	2	17	32	27	5	9	27
Writing Departments	8	15	--	--	77	4	12	4	28	52
Others	57	7	7	5	23	39	15	5	9	33
200 Level										
Humanities	4	8	--	12	77	5	7	5	18	67
Biological Sciences	45	7	21	10	17	15	8	23	8	46
Physical Sciences	43	21	--	14	21	80	--	--	20	--
Social Sciences	33	12	9	13	33	35	4	26	4	30
Writing Departments	8	--	--	8	84	4	13	4	22	57
Others	34	12	10	12	32	20	4	14	11	51
300 Level										
Humanities	4	--	--	7	89	7	4	--	8	81
Biological Sciences	38	3	14	17	28	14	14	23	11	37
Physical Sciences	53	18	--	--	29	30	35	8	14	14
Social Sciences	20	10	5	10	55	6	2	4	18	70
Writing Departments	8	--	--	--	92	7	--	--	13	80
Others	28	8	6	11	48	13	13	8	12	54

(SQ 3 cont)

	FACULTY		SENIORS	
	Approximately what percentage of the grade was determined by the quality of writing in the courses noted above? (FQ 4)		in a typical course in your major? (SQ 4)	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Humanities	34.6%	29.6%	64%	70%
Biological Sciences	17.1	9.9	16	10
Physical Sciences	6.6	5.1	16	5
Social Sciences	15.8	10.3	28	23
Writing Departments	46.4	40.5	74	80
Others	17.0	9.9	28	20
All Departments	21.2	10.4	32.5	22.5

	(FQ 4b) In evaluating the quality of writing on papers or examinations, what criteria did you employ?		(SQ 4b) what criteria did instructors use?	
1.	General clarity of expression	24.7%	Content, facts, supporting material	33.5%
2.	Organization, orderly transition of ideas, paragraph flow	18.6	General clarity of expression	16.3
3.	Grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, etc.	15.2	Organization, orderly transition of ideas, paragraph flow	16.3
4.	Content, facts, supporting materials	14.4	Grammar, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, etc.	11.5
5.	Conciseness and focused thesis	7.6	Conciseness and focused thesis	7.8
6.	All others	19.5	All others	14.6

Breakdown of above criteria by area

	Human	Bi Sc	Ph Sc	So Sc	Wr D	Other		Human	Bi Sc	Ph Sc	So Sc	Wr D	Other
1.	23.7%	19.7%	36.0%	24.4%	16.4%	24.5%	1.	16%	38%	64%	33%	21%	38%
2.	18.5	25.8	10.0	18.6	13.6	18.2	2.	16	20	16	14	15	16
3.	15.1	13.6	16.0	16.3	10.0	15.2	3.	21	7	5	21	24	15
4.	10.3	19.7	12.0	17.4	5.5	14.3	4.	14	16	--	10	12	11
5.	7.8	9.1	8.0	5.8	3.6	8.0	5.	4	17	--	8	3	9

FACULTY

(FQ 5) To what extent will the quality of writing affect the professional future of a typical student?

	Little Influence	Some Influence	Considerable Influence	Major Influence
Humanities	.9%	5.3%	38.1%	55.8%
Biological Sciences	2.2	15.2	58.7	23.9
Physical Sciences	1.8	36.4	50.9	10.9
Social Sciences	3.4	5.1	55.9	35.6
Writing Departments	--	2.4	31.7	65.9
Others	2.2	15.1	50.0	31.9
All Divisions	1.8	13.2	48.0	37.0

What particular aspects in a student's professional life will be affected by the quality of writing? (FQ 5b)

1. Scholarly writing and publishing	30.0%
2. Routine comuunication with colleagues (letters, reports, evaluations)	23.2
3. Virtually all aspects of one's professional life	10.2
4. Teaching and lecture preparation	8.4
5. Career mobility, evaluation of superiors	6.3
6. Ability to conceptualize or organize one's thoughts	4.2
All others	17.7

Aspects broken down by divisions (faculty questionnaire)

	Human	Bi Sc	Ph Sc	So Sc	Wr D	Others	All
1.	23.1%	36.0%	33.3%	30.8%	27.5%	29.7%	30.0%
2.	14.0	16.0	40.2	30.8	9.8	25.8	23.2
3.	16.1	6.7	--	14.1	20.0	8.7	10.2
4.	14.0	9.3	3.4	2.6	11.8	7.8	8.4
5.	6.3	8.1	8.0	2.6	5.9	6.3	6.3
6.	2.1	2.7	1.1	7.7	5.9	3.9	4.2

SENIORS

(SQ 9) To what extent will the quality of writing influence your academic or professional future?

	Little Influence	Moderate Influence	Considerable Influence	Major Influence
Humanities	--	19%	38%	44%
Biological Sciences	12	52	24	12
Physical Sciences	16	58	16	10
Social Sciences	2	31	41	26
Writing Departments	--	--	38	62
Others	7	42	31	20
All Divisions	6.3	37.3	31.7	24.6

What aspects of your future will be most affected by the quality of your writing? (SQ 9b)

1. Chosen career involves competent writing generally	36.6%
2. Scholarly writing and publishing	21.2
3. Admission to and success in graduate or professional school	17.2
4. Job applications, resumes, vitae, etc.	10.1
5. Social correspondence, non job-related reasons	6.0
6. Chosen career requires technical report writing	3.0
All others	5.9

(FQ 8) FACULTY

How has the writing quality of a typical undergraduate in your field changed during his/her stay at the University?

	Greatly Improved	Somewhat Improved	Unchanged	Somewhat Deteriorated	Greatly Deteriorated
Humanities	7.4%	64.9%	13.8%	12.8%	1.1%
Biol Sci	3.6	60.7	21.4	7.1	7.1
Phy Sci	2.7	37.8	48.6	10.8	--
Soc Sci	8.3	36.1	44.4	8.3	2.8
Wr Depts	5.6	72.2	11.1	8.3	2.8
Others	6.3	49.7	30.8	11.3	1.9
All	6.2	53.8	27.2	10.8	2.1

SENIORS (SQ 8)

How would you characterize any change in the quality of your writing since you came to the University?

	Greatly Improved	Somewhat Improved	Unchanged	Somewhat Deteriorated	Greatly Deteriorated
	31%	53%	13%	3%	--
	6	58	24	9	3
	11	42	26	21	--
	16	42	16	21	5
	39	62	--	--	--
	14	48	21	14	3
	16.7	49.2	19.0	12.2	2.4

(FQ 8b) Please list reasons which you believe may account for any change (SQ 8b)

Improvement

1. Practice, more papers, essay exams 31.7
2. Extensive instructor criticism and comments 10.6
3. Increased maturity or intellectual development among students

	Humanities	Biol Sci	Phy Sci	Soc Sci	Total
1.	34.8%	34.6%	37.6%	45.5%	31.7%
2.	15.2	7.7	--	13.6	10.6
3.	9.8	7.7	6.3	4.5	7.2

Deterioration

1. Indifferent faculty, no effort to teach good writing 5.0
2. Too few written assignments 4.4
3. Students have little motivation to improve their writing 2.8

1.	2.2	3.8	18.8	13.6	5.0
2.	2.2	7.6	18.8	4.5	4.4
3.	2.2	--	6.3	9.1	2.8

Improvement 82.8%

1. Practice, more papers and other writing assignments 45.5
2. Rhetoric or other introductory writing course 11.1
3. Respondent's personal desire and efforts 5.1

	Humanities	Biol Sci	Phy Sci	Soc Sci	Total
1.	42%	32%	13%	44%	45.5%
2.	8	16	27	3	11.1
3.	11	3	7	5	5.1

Deterioration 17.2

1. Lack of practice, surfeit of multiple choice exams 15.2

1.	--	13	17	15	15.2

	FACULTY				SENIORS			
(FQ 7 How much has been done to improve the quality of student writing by your department (or division)? *SQ 5) your major department?								
	Nothing	Very Little	Quite A lot	A Great Deal	Nothing	Very Little	Quite A lot	A great Deal
Humanities	25.0%	34.4%	29.2%	11.5%	6%	44%	41%	9%
Biological Sciences	76.7	20.9	2.3	--	64	30	6	--
Physical Sciences	75.5	20.8	3.8	--	53	47	--	--
Social Sciences	71.7	26.4	1.9	--	52	41	7	--
Writing Departments	--	19.4	54.8	25.8	--	23	54	23
Others	63.1	28.5	7.0	1.4	49	42	10	--
All Divisions	55	27	13	5	44	40	14	2

Please note what your department has done in this regard? (faculty) (FQ 7b)

1. Offers courses purposely designed to improve writing	29.2%
2. Instructors critique and comment amply upon student writing deficiencies	19.8
3. Requires more written assignments	15.6
4. Expects excellence in student writing and makes expectations known	14.6
5. Department has strengthened its rhetoric requirement	5.2
6. Upgrading and better in-service training for instructors and TA's	2.2
7. Encourages instructors themselves to write better	1.1
8. Requires foreign language training	1.1

Should any special efforts be undertaken by the department or college to improve the quality of student writing? (faculty) (FQ 9)

	Yes	No
Humanities	98.2%	1.8%
Biological Sciences	91.0	9.0
Physical Sciences	65.3	34.7
Social Sciences	86.7	13.3
Writing Departments	100.0	--
Others	86.6	13.4
All Divisions	88.7	11.3

What special efforts should be undertaken? (FQ 9b)

More written assignments in courses essay exams	17.8%
Extend rhetoric requirement	16.2
Pressure grammar and high schools to do job	9.6
Instructors grade partially on basis of writing quality	7.9
Rhetoric stress grammar more than literature interpretation	7.4
Stiffen admissions standards to the University	7.2
Stiffen grading in rhetoric courses	6.2
Remedial writing clinics for students with problems	5.9
More detailed instructor criticism and comments	4.4
Departments require specialized or technical writing course for majors	3.0
Mandatory writing skills exam for all students midway in their careers	2.5
Require more revisions of poorly written papers	2.2
Convince students of importance of quality writing	1.5
Make teaching of rhetoric as "respectable" and career rewarding as research	1.5
Require upperclassmen to take an additional refresher course	1.5
Require more reading	1.2
More emphasis on qualitative aspects of courses, less on quantitative	1.2
Smaller classes; improved competence of faculty; higher expectations of student writing; foreign language exposure	

Most frequent recommendations in order (1=most frequent)

	Human	Bi Sc	Ph Sc	So Sc	Wr D	Other
More writing	1	1	4	2	2	1
Extend rhetoric	2	5	1	1	1	2
Pressure schools	3	2	3	6	3	3
Quality writing	7	4	5	4	4	4
Stress grammar	4	8	2	8	7	5
Stiffen admissions	8	3	8	3	8	6
Stiffen grading	5	7	7	5	5	7
Remedial clinics	6	6	6	7	6	8

What might be done by the department or college to improve general quality of student writing? (SQ 10)

Require more papers and other written assignments	17.0%
Pressure grammar and high schools to do job	17.0
Require more essay exams	10.7
Rhetoric stress grammar more than literature interpretation	9.2
Provide remedial writing clinics for students with problems	8.5
Rhetoric courses more interesting or relevant to students' majors	8.5
Instructors grade partially on basis of writing quality	8.5
Extend rhetoric requirement	8.4
Improve competence of faculty in writing courses	3.1
More detailed instructor criticism and comments	2.6
Encourage or require more reading	1.9
Reduced class size; individualized attention	1.9

Most frequent recommendations in order (1=most frequent)

	Human	Bi Sc	Ph Sc	So Sc	Wr D	Other
More papers	4	2	3	1	5	1
Pressure schools	1	6	2	2	1	2
More essay exams	7	3	7	3	7	3
Stress grammar	2	4	5	5	4	6
Remedial clinics	3	8	6	4	2	4
Relevant courses	8	1	8	8	8	5
Quality writing	5	7	1	7	3	8
Extend rhetoric	6	5	4	6	6	7

(SQ 6)

Please note below any course (inside or outside your major area) that has contributed to an improvement in your writing style and quality.

Courses most frequently mentioned were:

Rhetoric (all levels)	43.8%
English	15.7
History	10.1

SENIOR RESPONSES ONLY

(SQ 6b)

The question "What aspects of the course or practices of the instructor contributed to this improvement? elicited the following comments among others.

Course required papers
Instructor criticized, commented upon written material
Course itself purposely designed to improve writing quality.
Instructor emphasized creativity, originality in writing
Instructor emphasized grammar, punctuation, sentence structure
Much class discussion and reading of student written assignments
Revisions of poorly written papers required
Course required essay examinations
Extensive required readings which reflect quality writing style
Instructor provided highly individualized attention
Instructor graded partially on the basis of writing quality
High expectations of instructors regarding student writing quality

(SQ 7)

Which courses did you take to satisfy the University's rhetoric requirement?

	All Divs	Human	Bi Sc	Ph Sc	So Sc	Wr D	Others
Rhetoric 101-102	3.2%	3%	3%	--	5%	--	4%
Rhetoric 105-108	66.7	75%	67	53	67	92	64
Speech 111-112	2.4	3	6	--	--	--	3
Transfer	15.9	16	18	16	14	8	17
Proficiency	11.9	3	6	32	14	--	13

(SQ 7b) Helpfulness of courses used to satisfy rhetoric requirement

	Rhet 105 or 108	Others
Helpful	54%	43%
Little or no help	46	57

Perceived change in writing quality since matriculation according to method of fulfilling rhetoric requirement.

Writing Quality	Took Rhet or Speech	Transfer	Proficiency
Improved	79%	30%	33%
Unchanged	13	40	27
Deteriorated	8	30	40
Recommendations for improving student writing quality			
Require more written work	25%	22%	50%
Extend or make more rigorous rhetoric courses	26	26	10
Reorient instruction	17	13	25
Influence schools to teach more grammar	17	17	15
Expand remedial English	11	13	25
Motivate students by raising expectations	4	9	--

(FQ 6)

FACULTY RESPONSES ONLY

How would you compare writing ability of present undergraduates with that of former students (or 5 or 6 years ago)?

	Significantly Better	Somewhat Better	About the Same	Somewhat Worse	Significantly Worse	About the same or Better	Worse
Humanities	1.0%	4.9%	39.8%	46.6%	7.8%	45.7%	54.4%
Biological Sciences	3.3	6.7	40.0	33.3	16.7	50.0	50.0
Physical Sciences	--	--	44.2	39.5	16.3	44.2	55.8
Social Sciences	--	6.8	59.1	22.7	11.4	65.9	34.1
Writing Departments	2.6	5.3	28.9	55.3	7.9	36.8	63.2
Others	0.5	4.4	47.8	35.2	12.1	48.7	47.3
All Divisions	0.9	4.5	44.5	38.5	11.6	49.9	50.1

Criteria used to evaluate student quality:

Perceived student writing ability	Criteria Used		
	Content	Style	Mechanics
Same or better	34%	20%	46%
Worse	23	19	58

August 1976

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES - UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Appendix C

294 Lincoln Hall
September 30, 1975

Professors Roger K. Applebee
Douglas Applequist
Robert W. Johannsen
Robert A. Jones
Reino Kallio
Howard S. Maclay
James J. Scanlon

Dear Colleagues:

There is increasing concern about the deteriorating quality of the English language as used by our undergraduates; and, after consulting with the Executive Committee of the College, I am appointing an ad hoc Committee on the Use of English (composed of representatives of the faculty and with Dean Applebee as Chairman) to consider what might be done to reverse this trend in the College. The problem is obviously a complex one: there is little in contemporary society that encourages either literacy or skill in written communication in the college-age group. Public schools appear to have abandoned the effort; and, it must be confessed, there is little insistence on the part of the faculty to promote high standards of language usage among our students, even in the humanities and social sciences.

We are not alone in our concern. Reports from the College Board attest to the lower achievement of high school students and many universities are addressing themselves to the problem. It is clear to me that we must undertake a more serious and concerted effort to improve the situation than we have in the past. The responsibility for improvement should not be given to the English Department alone; the effort must be a general one which might point to needed changes in admission standards as well as offer guidance to the faculty in general.

If we are to avoid condemning our graduates to the kind of peonage that is the inevitable result of one's inability to express himself adequately in spoken and written English, then I believe strong remedies must be undertaken. I would appreciate your advice and counsel regarding steps which can be undertaken and in the development of an appropriate overall strategy to remove or to ameliorate the problem.

I write to ask you to serve as members of the Committee to determine what steps are appropriate for us to take in an effort to improve standards of written communication in the College. In addition to the faculty membership, I am prepared to offer financial support to the Committee to employ a research assistant to help with compilation of data. I believe that the Committee

should not be as thorough and comprehensive in its review as time permits. You need not respond to this letter if you can consent to serve. Needless to say, I will be very grateful for your assistance. I will call a meeting of the committee in the near future to discuss the matter and lay before you the issues that seem to be involved as far as I can identify them at this time.

Sincerely yours,

Robert W. Rogers
Dean

RWR:nmc

cc: M. W. Weir

TABLE I *

Content of the ACT English Usage Test

Grammar and punctuation. Punctuation and graphic conventions; usage in agreement; verb forms; use of adjectives, adverbs, and nouns; pronouns and their antecedents; (Proportion of test = .35)

Sentence structure. Relation clauses; parallelism; placement of modifiers; and predication and shifted constructions. (Proportion of test = .25)

Diction. Word choice and idioms; figurative language; and economical writing. (Proportion of test = .35)

Logic and organization. Logical organization of ideas; the elimination of inappropriate ideas and statements; proper wording of transitions; paragraphing; and appropriate conclusions. (Proportion of test = .05)

Sample questions

Although sixty-five years ago, the open (1) range has all but (1) disappeared, cowboys still herd cattle in the West, still ride horses. (2) And roundups are still (2) held. And ranches, (2) though fenced, still (3) spread over ranges (3) (4) which were almost as (4) extensive as the holdings of Goodnight and Littlefield and Iliff nearly three-quarters of a century ago. A decade ago there remained near to (5) 1000 ranches of (5) more than 20,000 acres per each (6) ranch; more than (6) one-fourth of these--most of them in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona--containing (7) more than 100,000 acres.

1 A. NO CHANGE
B. ago, the open range was practically
C. ago the open range to all intents and purposes
D. ago the open range had almost

2 F. NO CHANGE
G. horses. They still hold roundups.
H. horses, roundups are still held.
J. horses, and still hold roundups.

3 A. NO CHANGE
B. fenced still will spread
C. fenced still are spreading
D. fenced, still have spread

4 F. NO CHANGE
G. ranges being
H. ranges, making them
J. ranges

5 A. NO CHANGE
B. nearly a thousand
C. something like 1000
D. in the neighborhood of a thousand

6 F. NO CHANGE
G. in each;
H. each;
J. at each one;

7 A. NO CHANGE
B. and containing
C. contained
D. contain

English Usage Answer Key

1. D	4. J	7. C
2. J	5. B	
3. A	6. H	

*Highlights of the ACT Technical Report, The American College Testing Program (Iowa City, 1973), p. 6.